



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

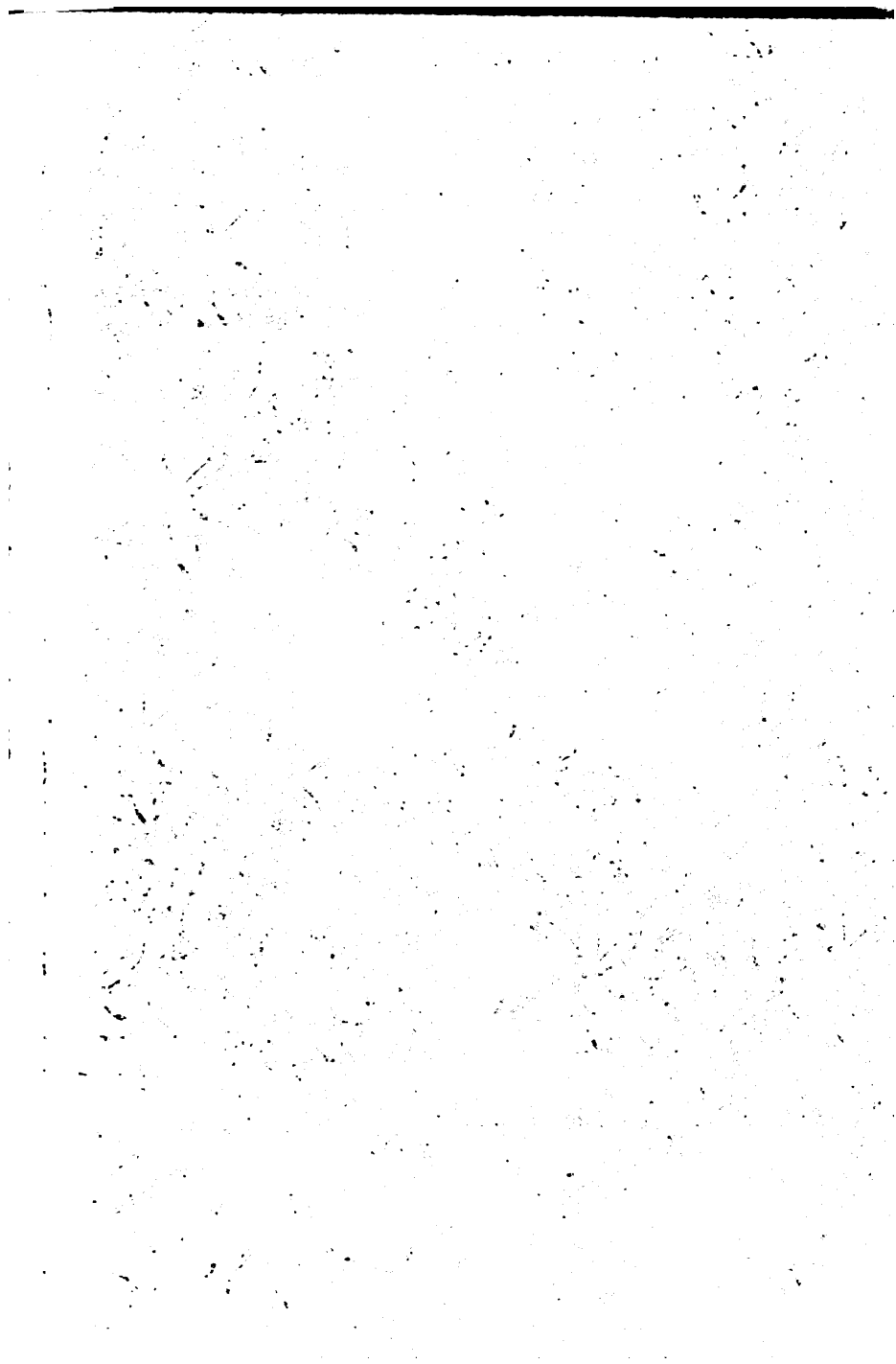
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

JEANNETTE









600073975.

JEANNETTE.

VOL. I.

RECEIVED
JAN 18 1961
FBI

JEANNETTE

BY

MARY C. ROWSELL

AUTHOR OF

"LOVE LOYAL," "ST. NICOLAS' EVE,"
&c., &c.

"I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more."

RICHARD LOVELACE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
18, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1881.

All rights reserved.

251. i. 14.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY DUNCAN MACDONALD, BLENHEIM HOUSE.
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

JEANNETTE.

CHAPTER I.

HAVERING COURT.

WE were orphans, my sister Isoline and I, Jeannette Latour. Our parents died within a few months of each other, when Isoline was twelve years old and I some two years older. The modest joint annuity we inherited, afforded the completion of our education at a good school in St. Grimwold's, the nearest town to Havering; and that accomplished, we returned to the

old home, our pretty, comfortable cottage, with its large, quaint garden, whose wooden fence skirted the high boundary wall of Havering Court, a fine old Elizabethan mansion belonging to the family of the Haverings for generations past.

There was French blood in our veins. Our paternal grandfather, for the crime of being the representative of one of the oldest of the ancient Norman noblesse, lost his head in the Place de Grève; his son, our father, only escaping a similar fate by being smuggled over in an English captain's ship to Southampton, whence he was taken to London and educated there by a gentleman for whom years before my grandfather had done some important service. As he grew up, he displayed high artistic talent, which eventually developed into power of such superior order that no pains were spared by his kind benefactor for starting him in

the career for which Nature had intended him, and he quickly established a reputation.

I have been told by those who well remembered him that, while not strictly handsome, he was eminently attractive, by reason of a certain winning grace of manner, and a beauty which intellect gives even in more abundance perhaps to irregular features than to faultlessly proportioned ones. At all events, he won the heart of a beautiful woman, the daughter of one of his painter friends, and she became his wife.

After a few years of hard work which, if it did not make him rich, gave him a fair competence, he brought our mother and us to live in the Havering cottage, which, with the ground it stood on, and an adjoining paddock, he made his own, to be inherited by his children "and," as the deed set forth, "by their heirs for ever."

I think my father selected Havering to rusticate in, for no better or worse reason than that a lovelier spot was not to be found within a hundred and fifty miles of London. To him and to the wife he so well loved, and who so truly loved him, the place must have seemed a veritable paradise. Alas! so soon to be broken in upon, for my dear mother was killed by a carriage accident, and my father's health, never strong, was so utterly shattered by grief for loss of her that he died soon after, leaving Isoline and me to the care of Mrs. Dorothea Tugnutt, who had served in my mother's family before her marriage, and had followed her to her new home, and ultimately to Havering, where she had taken a spouse unto herself, one Reuben Tugnutt, the cottage gardener and factotum. This new arrangement merely troubled the even flow of life in the little

domain to the extent of Reuben's abandoning his old sleeping quarters in the little stable-loft to the bats and owls, and sharing Mrs. Dolly's apartments beneath our roof. No children blessed their union. Had such an event happened, I am inclined to think Mrs. Tugnutt would hardly have esteemed it a blessing, since she always said we two were a handful in ourselves, and with tears in her eyes would recall the dying words of our parents when they besought her to take good care of us. During our school years, Mr. and Mrs. Reuben continued to live at the cottage, making much of us when we came back to it to spend our holidays, and when we returned for good, "finished young ladies" as she called us, we added a little village lass to the establishment, which trio henceforth constituted our staff of retainers.

With our joint three hundred pounds a

year, and the freehold, we were rich—for Havering; and I added to our wealth by the sale of my water-colour pictures, effected for me in London by an old artist friend of my father's, who adjudged my efforts worthy to compete for public honours. Isoline was a fine musician, but her gift she kept only for the delight of ourselves, and of our little circle of friends, devoting the chief part of her time to household affairs, for which she had a special genius, and of which she was constituted head. My sister, golden-haired and violet-eyed, and graceful as a sylph, was as sweet and gentle as she was lovely, the very counterpart of our dead mother, the people about us said.

My hair and eyes were dark like my father's, and I inherited his impetuous, ardent temperament. Would that I could have laid equal claim to all that frankness

and generosity of his, which had made him so universally loved !

Time passed tranquilly with Lina and me, only one remove I found it from monotony. Our vicar, the Reverend Trimmer Clerstere and his wife,—our good doctor, whose name was Verity, and his family,—one or two halfpay officers and their families, with the usual sprinkling of spinster ladies, made up the sum of Havering society. The sight of the postman turning in at our wicket on any day besides those four quarter ones, when he brought us the great formal-looking document announcing that our dividends were due, and to be had for the asking at St. Grimwold's bank, was quite an abnormal occurrence.

Cliffe Cottage, as our home was called, stood on the brow of the hill, overlooking Havering's snug thatched roofs and fine

old church, with its massive crenelated tower, accommodating colonies of swallows. A narrow and somewhat difficult by-road led from the village, past our house, to the lodge gates of Havering Court, with their huge pilasters supporting the rampant monsters whose claws clutched the armorial shield of the Haverings with its proud motto, "Loyal en tout;" a better one never was, I used often to think, unless indeed it was our own, "Noblesse oblige." Ay! for had not we too our watchword? and did not it lie scrollwise there among the roots of our family tree my father had drawn in his youth, and hanging now, a precious relic of him, over the piano in the snug drawing-room?

With the great house, however, we, like the rest of Havering, had little in common; our sole connection with it being the farce in which twice a week I enacted a principal

rôle, and which by courtesy was called the painting instruction which I imparted, or was supposed to impart, to Ursula, the dull-brained, leaden-complexioned, sickly, under-sized daughter of the haughty, cold Lady Havering, who ruled regent-wise at the Court in the absence of its owner, and my lady's nephew, Sir Morton Havering.

To me these lessons were a thorn in the flesh. Not alone did the money I received for them figuratively burn in my pocket, like so much stolen coin,—since no effort on my part could ever move Ursula's hand to produce the smallest semblance of anything heaven or earth ever saw, and more than two years of such hard labour witnessed no iota of progress—but also I had shrunk from placing myself in the position of instructress at the great house. Not assuredly from any false pride, but because I detested the place's gloom and shadow, and had a passive dis-

like and dread of the elder lady, while the semi-idiotic Ursula, on whom kindness seemed to have little effect, made me wretched for hours after I had escaped from the sombre library, where the lessons were given, and found myself safe once again in our cheery cottage.

I had, however, no possible plea for refusing Lady Havering's request that I would give Ursula these lessons. She had preferred it courteously, almost humbly, accompanying it with the declared conviction that a genius for the brush lay in her child. Alas! a miracle would have been needed to unearth it! But since her ladyship expressed herself satisfied with the fearsome daubs, what could I say? unless I desired to pain the heart which was all wrapped up in the unfortunate child. Such heart as she had!—for it was difficult indeed to conceive Lady Havering overburdened with

any such commodity, she was so reticent of it, and so freezing in demeanour, never, so far, at least, as my experience of the intercourse between mother and child went, unbending even with Ursula ; and, if I read her aright, ambition—cold, unscrupulous ambition—ruled down any softer passion that ever knocked at that thing my lady called her heart.

CHAPTER II.

BROTHER GRIMWOLD.

HAVERING COURT was a great Elizabethan mansion, standing upon yet earlier foundations amidst the century old trees of its magnificent park. Between these, however, and its broad carven stone and red-brick terraces, concealed from the vulgar eye by fantastically-clipped yew-hedges, ran on three sides a broad moat, while its western outworks found a natural protection in the river, which, after traversing the park glades, took a sharp curve just beyond its precincts, and flowed on between

the high grey-stone, verdure-clad banks, which often rose to a precipitous height, towards the old market-town of St. Grimwold's, lying three miles eastward.

To this place there were two roads from Havering; one, which was the old London coach-road, and leading almost arrow-straight, with only just a dip here and there between the furze-clumps and the high-lying moorland, into St. Grimwold's High Street, and so on again with undeviating precision as far as eye could reach towards its goal at the "Green Man" in Holborn, nearly half a hundred leagues ahead. The other road, longer by full the third of a mile, but at all times incomparably preferable to wayfarers by reason of its shade in summer and its protection in winter from the bleak north winds, ran by the river, turning out of Havering round by the church, and so on past the mill-dam, where, with deepening rush, the

water fell seething into the weed-grown shallows, eddying along in mad flight over the débris fallen from the rocky banks, which now frowningly overshadowed the water, now sloped nearly to its level.

Shortly after passing the weir, the brush-wood fringing the way began to gather so thick and tall that strangers setting foot there only first guessed at the river's nearness by the dash of its whirling waters. For some distance the way threaded onward between this thicket and the now receding cliff-like banks, until a turn in the road opened to a clear broad space, carpeted with freshest green herbage, kept velvet smooth as any gentleman's lawn by the natural action of ovine and bovine jaws, which always cropped at it with an air of such intense gourmandise as to leave no room for questioning its high repute for quality and flavour.

The creatures were doubtless like the monks of old, who, it is said, always knew a good thing when they found it; small blame to them! and perhaps it was the abundance of rich pasture-land, and of the surrounding wealth of wood and water in this spot, not to add its romantic and sheltered beauty, which prompted a community of Cistercian monks to pitch their dwelling-place there more than six centuries ago. Originally, as some ancient illuminated missals preserved in the library at Havering Court testified, the building had been dedicated under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary alone; but in later days the pious asceticism of a certain lay-brother Grimwold, one of the monastery's inmates, endowed him with such a high posthumous repute for sanctity that it got ultimately wafted to the Eternal City itself, and the humble lay-brother's name was enrolled

mid-air, superinducing suicidal temptations to weak heads, and an instinctive impulse to cling with desperate hold to the long dry tufted grass which waved in the breeze amid the lichen-covered stones. There in the monastery's palmy days the great bell had rung God-fearing folk from far and near to mass and evensong, while the two chambers in the tower's lower portion had been the private oratory and the guest-room of the prior, and still this tower was called "the Priest's Tower."

Until recently it had stood in prime favour as a clambering place with the neighbourhood's rising male generation, being a stronghold for certain owls' nests said to be hidden away in the crevices of its massive walls; but of late the juvenile marauders had pursued their investigations under strong protest of mothers whose apprehensive ears had lent credence to the report

which had begun to circulate that the foundations of the Priest's Tower were unsafe, and that the whole might topple over any day. People in general, however, laughed the assertion to scorn, and said that what had lasted hundreds, or, as some hazy chronologists would have it, thousands of years, and withstood countless storms, was hardly likely to begin to tumble down now, and at all events it is your creaking doors that last the longest.

All hours and seasons lent their special grace and colour to the old Gothic ruin, and the projecting mass of swarded rock concealing it from sight. A sense of involuntary regret at leaving it took possession of one, on turning to plod onward through the trees, now closely fringing either side of the road, and interlacing their sombre branches overhead. That which had been dreamy solemnity chilled

now to an oppressive melancholy, creeping on in some minds into something of shrinking and horror, as the dense foliage curtained darker and closer, admitting scarcely a ray of sunlight at broad mid-day itself.

On one side of the road, terminating the vista of this avenue, a little shepherd's cottage stood, a strikingly lonely object under its background of grey cliffs cresting to the clouds. Just past this, another deep curve of the road skirted the rock ledges, whose extreme verge began to be again hidden by the brambles tangling higher and thicker at each step, and which, as it gradually widened slantwise to the river rushing fifty feet below, became interspersed here and there with the gnarled grey boles of stunted oaks, which writhed their spreading arms in weird fantastic twistings across and across to each other, until soon they formed one compact dark thicket, impenetrable beyond

a yard's length to keenest eyes. A low, tumble-down fence of timber shut in this wood, but, a little beyond, it was accessible by a mildewed wicket hanging loose from its rusty fastenings, and freely admitting any who cared to descend the cracked and damp-discoloured steps winding to the wood's depths.

After taking one or two abrupt turns downwards, the few pilgrims who ever made their way to this spot, were apt to pause with a start, and fix their gaze in speculative stare on that black opening some six feet by nearly eighteen inches towards its upper end, but narrowing considerably at its two flattened extremities, which yawned below in the stony soil. In such black and sharp relief its outline loomed through the chiaroscuro that, for the instant, it cheated one into the fancy that some unburied coffin rested there; but a

second glance made clear that it was a cavity hewn in the solid platform of rock, and tenantless of aught save a few withered leaves drifted into it by the wind. Once, however, if tradition is to be trusted, it was the self-made grave of Grimwold the hermit, whose corpse mouldered within it to pulverized bone, and so to dust and nothingness.

Day by day, as his ghastly task progressed, the anchorite must have sat contemplating this cold, last resting-place he was making for himself; but scarcely harder or more comfortless than the bed of dry leaves on which winter and summer he used to lie o' nights just inside the cave which made his home, and whose dark entrance lay about half a dozen yards back from the grave. For, many a year before he died, this cave was all Grimwold's shelter from heat and cold; since, finding even his convent's rigid ruling insufficient for his own

self-chastisement, he fled at last from all human companionship whatever, and spent the remnant of his earthly life alone, breaking his fast with herbs and wild berries, and for his only drink the water of the tiny well, trickling doubtless then, as still it does, down the creviced rock through the grass to the river below.

But with the glow of mediæval romance colouring this spot, there mingled a fearsome mark of horror and of crime, perpetrated in recent times. The place was a Golgotha; and it was that which had brought upon it its evil reputation, and the silence of death for evermore. Grand-sires sitting in warm ingle nooks, when the storm howled without, would tell to shuddering younger generations how they have heard their fathers talk of the hideous murder committed in St. Grimwold's wood, and how the murderer—no half-witted,

idiot creature, but a man of parts and learning, and with something in him of God-like intelligence—dragged the corpse of his victim into the hermit's cave, and, hurriedly covering it with fallen leaves and brambles, glided down snakewise through the undergrowth to the river's margin, and so effected his escape over yonder bridge into the desolate hill country on the other side, from man's justice, but never, sleeping or waking, at bed or board, day nor night, from conscience ; until years after, when he could endure its stings no longer, he came back and gave himself up, and how, being hanged in chains, here amid the very trees which had once stood silent witnesses to his foul crime, his bones, worn fleshless, rattled and shook in the wind to almost within living memory.

And so grisly reality, twining its thread with romance, casts a weird veil of mystery

over St. Grimwold's wood, and leaves it in its loneliness, which would be utter were there not a few adventurous spirits who, with awe and many a glance round, dare to steal there by full morning's light in quest of the violet, and primrose, and blue-bell flowers which carpet its green sward in such luxuriant profusion, or the giant blackberries weighing down its brambles. Sometimes, too, a pair of lovers, fear-proof in their hearts' magic panoply, will wander there, knowing how one against ten are chances of intrusion ; and again those tough, practical folks, who would brave hell's own three-headed watch-dog to save ten minutes, will not hesitate to traverse it at any hour by the little path which, crossing it from St. Grimwold's end, mounts by a sheer upward slope to a gap in the bushes close under the monastery wall, shortening the distance by quite a hundred yards.

Normally constituted men and women, however, preferred always to keep the road above, which, after winding on solitarily for another quarter of a mile, brought them to a somewhat sharp incline, from whose brow could be seen, lying within its undulating semi-circle of hills bounding the horizon, the ancient abbey church and gabled roofs of St. Grimwold's.

CHAPTER III.

MY LADY.

HAVING done its shopping at St. Grimwold's; for with the exception of our village emporium, which indeed traded in nearly every branch of commerce from beef to bull's-eyes, and Dame Tuffery's tiny lattices, which displayed a little phalanx of gingerbeer-bottles, a brass thimble or two, some cadaverous-looking peppermint-drops, and several rows of tall pins stuck on yellow paper, there was not the ghost of a shop in the place. At Josiah and Oliver Milligans', Brothers, however, in St. Grimwold's High

Street, you might, as the female upper ten of Havering would tell you, send to Howell and James, or to Madame Élise herself, and not be so well pleased with your bargains as if you had gone to Milligans'.

But there was nothing remarkable in that; since their forewoman, a most intelligent and obliging person, went regularly every month up to London, not to speak of her biennial Parisian pilgrimage, in search of fashion's sublimest and beautifullest.

Without in any way desiring to detract from the eminent catering qualities of the two old bachelor linen-drapers and man milliners, one may dare to assume that something of their success was due—no, no, vade retro, Satan!—certainly not out of natural compassion to their life's single conditions, and a desire to ameliorate it on the part of their spinster customers, for you might have set your cap at either, and

failed ingloriously indeed, since the elderly Benedicks had long ago extinguished all gentle embryo aspirations with the sweet but crushing assertion that where all was so sweet it would indeed be invidious to choose. To say nothing, perhaps, of the falling off in the exchequer which might have ensued in the event of their popularity being dimmed by the prose of connubial ties. And so there seemed every possibility of these virtuous Don Juans descending to their honoured graves wifeless, if not unwooded.

No, if their celibacy was a secondary source of their success, a primary one, I am inclined to fancy, rose out of the fact that their establishment, situated as it was within driving or walking distance of Haver-
ing, enabled its inhabitants to execute their own commissions, and see beforehand what their purchases had a chance of being like,

instead of getting them down from London, which, after all, when you came to think of it, was a most wretchedly pig-in-a-poke way of going to work. Besides, shopping is an instinctive impulse with women; and, moreover, it was a special boon to Havering ladies, with whom, for the most part, time was a drug in the market, after they had got through the prescribed quantum of inquiring into their poorer neighbours' concerns, which they called district-visiting.

The charge of "ritualistic" proclivities, of which our village, I believe, held me "suspecte," was one which I was never concerned to discuss; but, had I belonged to the straitest sect of all the seven score odd this free country of ours is said to be favoured with, I think I must have admitted that something good was to be found in Nazareth, when Tractarians endowed with a new life the working of Sisterhoods. Admitting

with all frankness that no system of charitable aid is flawless, and impressed with the conviction that the conditions of the case render this inevitable, take it for all in all, house-to-house visiting seems less objectionable in the hands of these quiet-garbed women, who have made it their life's business, and generally their heart's happiness, than when it is at the mercy of female detectives, such as those Havering ladies, who, in utter defiance of the time-honoured postulate that an Englishman's house is his castle, especially at dinner time, used to sail, clad in the last sweetest promenade toilette, into labourers' cottages, where the good man was consoling himself, for hours of toil, with cabbage and hunks of coarse bread, or taking his forty winks after that sumptuous repast, while his life's partner, dishclout in hand among her tin mugs and delft platters, was straightening

up—that was the precise hour of the twenty-four these Havering ministering angels too often selected for personal inquiry into the spiritual needs of their district, and for effecting the weekly exchange of their pious pamphlets, always so pregnant, like spoonfuls of jam that cover bitter drugs, of double-dyed Calvinistic theology, under a flimsy apology of fictional domestic tragedy.

Looking on this picture, my mind's eye turns to another I saw long ago, when once I had strayed down a grimy London court, about four o'clock one sultry summer's afternoon. Only a little family group it was, of young ones and elders gathered round a rickety tea-table, drawn into the doorway, standing wide open to catch such air as might have lost its way in that cul-de-sac. They had a guest, these people, a woman with a homely and not youthful face, but sweet and gentle-looking under its

veil and spotless white cap, and her soft grey dress that, for all it was so plain, fell in folds more gracious than stiff satins and silks can ever reach to; and the sister of mercy sat there—one of that little family—a stranger to the social distinction which dilettante charity ladies contrive to impregnate the very air with under similar circumstances. When that woman knocked at those good people's door to-day, I asked myself, yielding to the temptation of drawing comparisons, did the good wife, as she let her visitor in, wish her at Jericho, as I often fancy our Havering women were apt to do when my lady, for instance, effected an entrance into their stronghold, armed with her paper-war weapons? But I desire to make no sweeping assertions; and while vulgar ostentation strode about our village, under the guise of beneficence, we had many a real true-hearted

Lady Bountiful who carried consolation on her lips, and comfort in her purse, to the poorer half of our community. But the mistress of the great house was not one of these; her heart was as mean in giving as her nature was narrow and chilly, and her thin lips ready to find fault and nag at every peccadillo committed in the place.

She was merciless to all whose shibboleth did not twang with the acrid tone of her own. Nobody who, by the slightest deviation, ran his sense of the fit and becoming against hers—from the vicar to the two year old mud-pie maker in the gutter downwards—escaped unscathed from the lash of my lady's tongue, and if there were folks in Havering who set to wondering now and again why the lord of the manor tarried so long away from his little kingdom, and thought that the existing rule—for all

its probity and correctness—was capable of improvement, it was not so very astonishing.

The economy of Havering Court was indeed perfect; and my lady, to do her justice, saw every particle of its owner's wishes concerning it rigidly carried out. Yet the place always seemed to me like some beautiful corpse, so destitute it was of life and stir; and a sense of something like despair always seized me whenever I set foot in the threshold of its lofty entrance hall, hung with the arms and trophies of dead and gone Haverings, a feeling which by no means lessened in the presence of the mother and daughter.

The haughty civility with which Lady Havering, nearly three years earlier, had first received me into her house, never warmed into anything beyond. She always remained

present during the lessons, sitting silent at her tambour work frame, piercing through and through the tight-drawn stuff before her, like Lachesis' self, dismissing me at the conclusion of the ordeal with an inclination of her head. An ordeal that task of mine was; whether greater for pupil or teacher it is hard to say. Ursula's stolid features rarely brightened by so much as a momentary gleam, the stiff fingers never grew more lissom for all the pains I bestowed on them; and the reward of my labour, which ordinarily would have been so congenial, began and ended with the guineas which once in three months Lady Havering laid in my hands, wrapped in an elaborately monogrammed envelope.

"Was ever such unblushing thievery?" I said to Isoline once, on my return after one of these occasions, as I emptied out the money on the table.

"Oh!" lazily returned she, "you'll beat it into her one of these days, I daresay."

"Not if they should be as long as Methuselah's, which the saints forefend!" devoutly ejaculated I.

"Well, what does it signify? Miss Haver-
ing can say she has learned painting, at all events, can't she?"

"She can *say* so, certainly."

"Well, that's hair-splitting; you know what I mean, and it isn't likely she'll ever be pressed for proof positive of her accomplishment. She'll be able to make believe."

"And 'assume a virtue if she has it not.'"

"Yes," nodded Lina, "and I suppose the future wife of Morton Havering——"

"Good gracious!"

"What's the matter?—must be accredited with knowing something more than the three R's—what are you shivering at, child?"

"The bare notion of marrying such a creature!"

"Sir Morton Havering?"

"Don't be absurd; Ursula, I mean."

"My dear, she has thirty thousand pounds."

"It's such an awful desecration."

"Arranged marriages generally are, I fancy."

In the present case, however, the arrangement was altogether a one-sided affair, and evolved solely and entirely out of my lady's inner consciousness. Ever since her marriage with Havering Court's late lord, she had lived within its walls; but she had brought him no heirs to his estate, and the sole fruit of their union had been the puny Ursula. On Sir Wilfred Havering's death, therefore, the entail, in default of direct male descent, passed to the son of his younger brother, a young man of some

three or four and twenty, named Morton. This had taken place eight years previously, and still Sir Morton, who, said rumour, had what people call artistic tastes, lived abroad somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Italian lakes. Beyond this we knew nothing of our absentee lord; only this we could have told him, that, come when he might, his bride had been made ready for him, unless, indeed, mischance should lead him to bring one home with him. This, however, seemed hardly probable, since not the faintest threatening of such a catastrophe had ever reached Havering, always eager to glean scraps of enlightenment concerning Sir Morton, and, as far as one might gather, he was still unshackled with a wife, and nothing threatened to clash with her ladyship's plans—that is, from her ladyship's point of view.

Well dowered as Ursula was with her

private fortune, Lady Havering's cold, ambitious imaginings were unable to conceive any objections on her nephew's part to such an alliance. To her it seemed that the gold and the good birth to which incontestably her child could lay claim, amply covered any slight mental or physical shortcomings. Of what stuff Sir Morton was made, and how he would fall in with the exquisitely simple flow of life marked out for him, remained to be seen.

On first coming into the estate, he had written to his aunt, placing Havering Court at her disposal for so long as it suited her to remain there. A somewhat ambiguous mode of expression, which my lady construed into a desire on his part that she would continue to make the goodly old house her home; and it had suited her to remain established in it, careful, at the same time, to impress upon Sir Morton that, con-

venient or inconvenient to herself, she did so for his sake—that she might see that he was not “robbed,” as she phrased it in those amiable epistles she penned to him regularly once a month.

Now nobody was less likely to be robbed by his own people, as Lady Havering quite well knew, or ought to have known, than Sir Morton. There was not an honester man in the whole shire than John Harlock, the Havering Court bailiff, who had served under the former lord for twelve years, and who always took care that his subordinates were as honest as himself, or sent packing. He had endured much at Lady Havering’s hands in the *roi fainéant* days of Sir Wilfred, of whom little enough was ever seen or known; and whose death had created a far profounder impression by reason of the stately eight-horsed hearse which carried him to the family vault in Havering church

than any event of the threescore years of his life had ever done. It was my lady who had always settled accounts in her husband's time; and kept a keen eye on every item of expenditure over the property, and under the new order of things she continued to do much the same. If, however, my lady was a clever woman, Mr. Harlock was a clever man, who possessed the gift of having everything his own most excellent way, while he made her ladyship believe she had entirely hers. It was a stupendous quality, but the man possessed it in abundance, and the regent and the prime minister had rubbed on together with tolerable smoothness through the eight years of Sir Morton's tarrying away.

CHAPTER IV.

STILL WATERS.

THE protracted absence of Sir Morton Havering occasioned my lady little uneasiness. It accorded rather with her plans well enough. Secure in that possession which is said to be nine points of the law, she looked with all the confidence in the world to time and opportunity for cementing the union she aspired to, and which was to atone so thoroughly for her own shortcomings in the matter of providing a direct heir to Havering. Seven thousand a year was the utmost value yielded by its acres, and Ursula's thirty thousand pounds, my lady

thought, were hardly likely to be flouted, merely because her features and form were not quite as symmetrical as some of the tocherless damsels Sir Morton might meet with in his wanderings.

Still as time went on, and Ursula was nearly nineteen, Lady Havering pressed her nephew's coming home, if only for a few days, to see how things were going; making a merit of having done so to the bailiff, who possibly, in the gladness of his heart at the prospect of having a man to deal with, went home at once and told his wife, who told it to Havering, and so we came to be cognizant of the possibility of a visit from Sir Morton.

It was, I remember—am I likely ever to forget?—one fine morning in early summer that, having gone through the usual hateful mockery of my lesson, I was about to take my departure, when Lady Havering informed

me, in her icy, formal tones, that Sir Morton was expected home.

"And," continued my lady, "for the period of his stay here your services, Miss Latour, will not be required."

I bowed my head, and turned to go.

"During my nephew's visit," added she, with the faintest thaw of her freezing condescension, "Miss Havering and I place ourselves entirely at his disposal. You smiled, I think, Miss Latour?"

"I was not conscious of doing so, Lady Havering."

"I fail to apprehend how my remark could have amused you," she returned, with a half suppressed glitter of defiance in her pale eyes.

"I was perhaps thinking," said I, boldly, "that Sir Morton's coming would be hailed with satisfaction by—everybody. His tenants, of course, I mean."

"On what grounds?" challenged the jealous châtelaine. "You speak as if the hitherto administration of Sir Morton's affairs had not afforded satisfaction."

"I have never heard the breath of a murmur against it," asseverated I, with honest eagerness.

"In any case," she continued, resuming her work, "his presence or absence will little concern Havering."

"It must do that," contended I, "in so far as the sight of one's absentee lord always does afford pleasure. Unless, of course, he be a monster."

"How do you know he isn't?" sharply demanded my lady.

"The Haverings have always borne such reputation, time out of mind, for urbanity and sweetness. If the rule must be proved by an exception——"

"It would be superfluous," interrupted her ladyship, "to discuss the question of what Sir Morton may or may not be. You—Havering, that is to say, will see but little, if anything of him. If you flatter yourself—if Havering flatters itself, Miss Latour, that his coming is to be the signal for senseless merrymakings and idle mummeries, it is vastly mistaken, let me tell you. Sir Morton is no panderer to vulgar village popularity. He comes to Havering Court in quest of retirement and repose. I trust he will find it, Miss Latour."

"I should imagine there is no doubt of it," replied I, stealing a glance of shuddering awe round that gloomy presence-chamber.

"Not if vulgar curiosity obtains over good breeding," said my lady, following my glances with her own. "You understand me."

"I confess I do not."

She was silent, and continued to stab her canvas stuff fiercely.

"Sir Morton is unmarried," she said, at last. "And very—personable," she added, looking up to ascertain why I made no comment. "Very personable, Miss Latour."

"So I have heard, Lady Havering."

"Indeed!" she rejoined, poisoning her steel weapon in its midway course, and elevating her arched brows. "And where, may I inquire, did you obtain that interesting information?"

"Common hearsay," bluntly explained I.

"And you condescend to listen to village chatter? It should have added that my nephew's good looks are surpassed by his pride——"

"Of birth, do you mean?"

"Precisely. My nephew is exclusiveness itself. He carries this—quality to an ex-

treme, Miss Latour. Indeed, I—have reason to believe that his passion for solitude is so great that, if his inclinations were strictly respected, the park gates themselves would be closed during his stay here.”

“Good gracious!” exclaimed I, fairly startled at the bare contemplation of such a thing. “Is Sir Morton—a—that is—they say he is very clever, I believe.”

“Very intellectual,” bowed my lady. “But pray do not let me keep you standing in this manner. I merely desired to have explained to you that, when Sir Morton has left Havering Court again, I will send my maid Sharples, or one of the other servants, with a note to say on what day your instructions to my daughter can be renewed. Good morning, Miss Latour.”

Impressed to semi-suffocation with a sense of the coming Sir Morton’s utter disagreeableness, I fetched a deep sigh of relief as I

passed out into free air, and fell to wondering how long he might be proposing to inflict his presence upon Havering. A little purchase I had to make at "the shop" brought me home by the village green, where I came upon a concourse of our native population inspecting, with open-mouthed interest, a heap of laths and bunting.

"It's for the arch, miss," shouted a dozen voices, in reply to my interrogatories. "The arch az iz a-gwoin' to be zet up for Zir Morton."

"Oh, indeed!" said I. "This is a voluntary affair?"

"A what, 'm?" gasped one of my informants.

"There have been no orders for this to be done from the Court?" elucidated I. "It is the village people themselves who are doing it?"

"Ay, zure-ly," proudly returned a patriarch. "Havering don't need the Coort to be teachin' of it what's the right thing to be a-doin' of when the mester cooms 'ome to hiz own."

"But Lady Havering——"

"Her be—leastways, let her la'ship mind her own bizness, and we'll mind our'n, as we're a-doin' of now."

"And you think Sir Morton will—like it?" queried I.

"Like it or leave it, he'll 'ave to go through it, if he's aught o' mind to sleep under hiz own roof-tree o' Thursday night, for it's gwoin' to be fixed right 'ere acrost; look zee," and my friend waved his stick from side to side of the broad old village street. "We don't have no sneakin's in round by the back-doors for such az 'im."

"But——"

"And if all 'counts speak true, he's safe to like it, for he's a rare an' pleasant gen'leman, zo 'tis zed."

"Ah! indeed. Well, the devices are pretty," said I, glancing at them.

"Ye-es. They're well enough," critically said my Nestor; "but we'll give 'im a zight viner nor these, the day he brings hiz bride along. The Lord zoon zend him a kind, sweet lady, and——"

"Handsome, you were going to say, of course," laughed I.

"Oo—ay! was I, now?" grinned he. "Well, I never waz no despiser o' the 'andsome lasses, that's true; but we're az the Lord made uz, ain't uz? and 'andsome is as 'andsome does. That's allays a rare an' fine motter, to my way o' thinkin'."

And so, not a little exercised by the strongly conflicting rumours touching Sir Morton, I related them to Isoline, over our

little tea-table drawn cosily up in the deep bow of the window opening on to the verandah, where the young white roses clustered, and wafted their fragrance into the old, low-ceiled drawing-room.

Tired with the labour I so little delighted in, and my subsequent expedition into the village, I lay lazily back in my chair, indulging in a *dolce far niente*. Nothing, that is, excepting the contemplation of Isoline's face, but that was a study of mine as old as I was myself; and I had each curve and lineament of those beautiful features graven in my heart of hearts, yet sum them up in inventory fashion in poor formal words, I cannot. It would be desecration to single out and analyse items of loveliness which went to make up such a perfect whole. I could only wonder—as I lay there watching her, behind her cups and saucers, with her attendant genius, Scamp, perched on his

patient haunches at her side for the bit of sugar which he knew was as certainly forthcoming as day follows night,—and wonder where the peer of that Parian fairness, the marvellous golden-brown tints of that luxuriant hair twisted in rich coils above the shapely little head, the soft quiet smile of the perfect lips, and the tenderness shining beneath their long dark lashes, of the eyes deep and translucent blue as a summer sea. But what could the best word-painting tell of my sister's exquisite beauty? Yet greater than all, perhaps, was the charm of her lithe figure. Of middle height, and neither spare nor full, she moved with a stately simple grace that was a consolation to the eyes, in these times of slouching, awkward limbs, and equally the indolent poses of her when yielding to the spell of the last new magazine story, or lost in the dreamland the music her own fingers

made when she sat like some Saint Cecilia at her piano, were a delight to look upon, because of the utter lack of self-consciousness which one sometimes—not often, certainly,—does see in women of pre-eminent beauty.

All the graces and refinements of our race seemed to have met together like the fairies at Sleeping Beauty's birth, and contributed their quota to the making of her perfect womanhood. Perfect? Had not, then, the unkind fairy been there too? Well, I trow not. "'Andsome is as 'and-some does," my village philosopher had said that very afternoon, and Lina was just an exemplification of the rather rare combination of moral and material beauty. Second only to my own love for her, stood the affection she had won from the whole village. Hers was no yea-nay heart, wrapped up in the contemplation of its own superior

clay. Blessings deep and fervent for her gentle, unobtrusive charity were implored for her at the high God's throne by poor and desolate creatures whom her kind words and her generosity had comforted in their distress. It is needless to say that those discriminating creatures, the animals, from her own wiry-haired, shock-headed Scamp to Dame Tuffery's little brown linnet in his wicker cage, adored her. Not a woman of genius, with every ology new and old at fingers' ends, was Isoline, but for all that intelligent and accomplished, and carrying to almost the point of genius her one great musical gift.

And so, beautiful, clever, and sweet-tempered, had notwithstanding that malign fairy been present with her dower?

Well, some, I think, would scorn my question, and declare that rather one gift had been super-added; and, indeed, the

extremes of good and evil do meet in such a manner as utterly to defy the mark of their joining. The fault—there, I have written it; characteristic, my pen should have spelt it—was a certain calm, reposeful bearing, removed as far as the poles asunder from inanity—Heaven forbid! No, it was rather the unruffled serenity which one fancies the angels have, and finds hard to credit man or woman with. Yet that was her temperament, the outcome of her—humanly speaking—absolutely pure and unselfish nature, and no less perfect and healthful physical beauty. Yet to me, whose soul was a battle-field where ill was ceaselessly struggling with good, a sombre sea flecked only here and there with light, Isoline was sometimes an incomprehensible being—must I admit it?—irritating, even, now and again. Not personally irritating; her tranquil ways never ruffled me. My

vexation consisted in the dread lest others might misjudge her. For my part, I believed I knew too thoroughly well the warm, fathomless depths of affection underlying that calm surface; and I was but jealous lest others should not appreciate their priceless worth, and—well, well, after all, it was an excellent fault this reticence, if fault it was. Would she could have bestowed some particle of it on me, for ever getting into hot water for speaking my mind!

CHAPTER V.

MALVINA'S LITTLE WAYS.

A CLOUDLESS July sun shone on Sir Morton Havering's coming home. Isoline and I, however, sitting under the old mulberry-tree on the lawn, had no more than a passing glimpse of him through our thick private hedge, as his travelling-carriage rumbled past our house, to turn in at the park gates.

Handsome-featured, we could see that he was, and, unless our brief glimpse of him played us false, he had a pleasant, gratified smile upon his face, which seemed to witness

to the content he had felt at his reception down in the village.

“He was pleased with the arch, after all, depend upon it, Lina,” laughed I, “and, at any rate, that shows his sense, for I suppose it’s the last bit of anything like cheerfulness he’ll be troubled with while his foot is on the soil of his inheritance.”

“He’ll have his cousin Ursu——”

“Don’t, child!” interrupted I—“it’s beyond a joke.”

“My dear, I’m serious about it, as you say my lady is herself,” demurely replied Lina.

“Such a sacrifice,” I went on, crimsoning involuntarily, “would be too hideous.”

“He’ll make it with his eyes open, at all events,” said Lina, carelessly lifting her own to my face. “To change the subject, Netta, my dear, what a handsome woman you are, when you get any colour in that pale face

of yours! It's always worth a king's ransom to see you roused."

"What nonsense you do talk, Lina! What am I roused about now, pray? He—— It's no concern of mine."

"No—nor mine neither," yawned she; "and Sir Morton may come, and Sir Morton may go, backwards and forwards—oh! dear, Scampy, my pet!—till the crack of doom, before any of us three would have the felicity of so much as a chance word with him."

But *Dieu dispose*; and, clever as Lady Havering might be, she could not control fate. Had her guest, or her host, call him as you will, been the Ko-hi-noor, he could not have been more jealously guarded by her. One or two stately dinner-parties had indeed been given at Havering Court since he came, but, as half a hundred was the lowest average age of the lady-guests deem-

ed eligible for admission to those august banquetings, one could hardly help fancying that they might have been a trifle dull; and soon rumour, who contrives to squeeze between the closest and loftiest of chevaux de frise which ever hedged in semi-divinity, whispered that Sir Morton was going away. Whether to come back again later, and claim Ursula Havering for his bride, who could say? No echo of how my lady's plans might be speeding reached us. Once or twice in our walks we had encountered Sir Morton, and he certainly looked bored to death, unless that Lara-like mingling of apathy and despair in his dark, handsome eyes had any hidden connection with an ecstatic devotion to his heiress cousin.

He spent the greater part of his time out of doors, riding to the uttermost limits of his estate to visit his tenantry and farms, and making personal acquaintance with the

people about, earning golden opinions for his pains.

“One as knows taters from turnips, he is; every bit as well as if he'd never been forineerin' abroad in all his life, and as pleasant a gentleman as ever you did see,” was the universal male verdict on him, and, “bless his noble face,” the female rider.

As for Lina and myself, beyond those two or three wayside meetings, the last of which chanced in Bogslush Lane, at its narrowest turning, he might have been at the Antipodes for aught we knew of him. But it was impossible to ignore one another in Bogslush Lane; the perils of its way forbade that. Barely five feet wide, muddy at summer's very drought, sinuous as a snake, and long as that proverbial lane, any encounter in it necessitated the daintiest manœuvring for keeping clear, even in the case of pedestrians; but when one wayfarer

was on horseback, as Sir Morton was, when we met him that summer evening among the green nut-branches and trailing wild roses, then the affair was indeed a complication only to be unravelled by temporary self-effacement on the part of one or the other of the conflicting bodies. And accordingly he drew aside his horse, and, courteously lifting his hat, waited to let us pass, yet still when we were some way on, and the half-hour dinner-bell had begun to clang its summons furiously from the great house, Sir Morton stood where he had reined up, at the turn of the lane, looking back. Well, certainly, prettier picture in its way could not be. That group of small fry, with their curly flaxen polls and bits of coloured pinafores, clambering among the hazel-bushes.

"No wonder he looked back," said Lina, glancing with a little smile at me.

And I, with my eyes fixed on my beautiful sister, where she stood, the glowing amber and crimson of the setting sun illuminating her fair face, murmured to myself, "No wonder!"

That magnificent sunset, fading at last in a dense bank of copper-coloured cloud, foretold a stormy morrow. For days, thunder had been sullenly rolling in the oppressive air, and the heat was intense; and next morning, Lina, going languidly about her household affairs, declares that any creature, biped or quadruped, who stirs an inch without full and sufficient reason, will make an interesting subject for a lunacy inquiry.

"There you have both then—horse and rider complete!" laugh I, pointing my long feather-dusting brush, with which I have been dislodging the lazy flies from the picture-frames, in the direction of the gate.

"For there is Sir Morton himself on Malvina."

"That points my argument," says Lina, "for he has only chosen the least between two evils, depend upon it. The atmosphere is oppressive, but not quite so bad, I expect, as a *tête-à-tête* in the morning-room at the Court."

"All the same," return I, looking after him through the screening creepers with eyes that would be unworthy of the name, did they fail to mark his perfect grace as he rides, "he must be mad to have taken that skittish Malvina."

"She's his favourite."

"How do you know?"

"Well, I've—noticed, I suppose, and of course he's aware of all her tricks and ways by this time."

"But she's utterly unmanageable in thunder and lightning. I heard the groom telling Lady Havering so some time ago,

and he said she ought to be got rid of."

"That shows," smiles Lina, "how Sir Morton has stolen a march to-day, then, on my lady, for, if she had known, she would never have let him risk his precious life—"

"It's no laughing matter," interrupt I, half angrily.

"Nonsense; the storm's hours off."

"And do not his riding excursions last hours? Haven't you noticed——"

"Good gracious, no!" merrily laughs Lina. "You seem to have bestowed quite an amount of attention on Sir Morton's movements."

"Stuff!" I cry, crimsoning at her saucy imputation. "I have eyes, that's all."

"And the grandest, biggest, beautifulest, brownest ones that ever flashed righteous indignation," she cries, throwing her arms round my neck and hugging my good humour back to me. "If Don Quixote out

there should ever come under the glamour of them, alas ! for his Dulcinea of Havering Court."

Then she seats herself at her piano, and is lost to the miseries of the hot, thundery world around her in a Schubert impromptu, whilst I, exhausted with my raid on the flies, throw myself into my chair in a shady corner of the verandah, and pretend to hem a duster ; but soon my limp hands sink on my lap, and I deliver myself up to watching the clouds gathering fast and thick on every side, until no speck of blue remains.

" 'Twill be a wunner when it du come," says Tugnutt, passing presently with his barrow full of weeds, and dropping its handles to mop his damp, shiny face, "and zooner the better, say I, Miss Netty."

"Yes, indeed."

"Them as chances, though, to be out in

it, won't come 'ome again zo dry as they go'ed," ironically continues Reuben, glancing up at the black canopy overhead.

"Not to speak of the lightning," I remark.

"You speak right there, Miss Netty," acquiesces he.

"I suppose you saw Sir Morton Havering go by this morning, Reuben?"

"Not a 'orseback, zure?" he demands, turning with some anxiety on me.

"Yes—on Malvina."

"Malweeny! why, I'd zooner be astride a witch's broom-stick, saving your presence, Miss Netty, than have my legs acrost thet there beastes' back under a sky like this."

"And you haven't chanced to see him return?"

"He an't a-coomed back, to my knowledge, and I'm pretty zure to ha' seen him, havin' been all day a-clippin' o' the 'edge

there, and if zo be he's astride, as you say, Miss Netty, o' that there Malveeney, why, then, he's a dead man, as one may zay—leastways, good az dead. The jade's az full of her little ways as a egg's full o' meat, and az to lightnin'—she won't stand neery wink o't."

"Oh, Reuben! But he may have gone round home the other way, you know."

"Zo he may. But 'tan't likely. This here's his fav'rite road."

"Oh, dear—that dreadful horse!"

"Indeed," returned my Job's comforter, "that's what you may call her, Miss Netty. Ask Jack, ostler down to the 'Green Dragon,' if she can't kick and shy like blazes, for all the gentle looks of her. Why, she flinged his brother the jockey wunst; pitched right on 'iz 'ead he did, and everybody thought he were killed, ded az a door-nail, az the zayin' is."

“And he wasn’t?”

“No, but ’twarn’t no thanks to her that he fell zoft. All she thought about was that she warn’t a-goin’ to stand no non-sense; and as to thunner an’ lightnin’—why, there, what can it be but out an’ out non-sense from a ’orse’s point o’ view, eh? Stands to reason like, don’t it, Miss Netty—oo—ay, there’s the virst spat o’t.” And, grasping his barrow-handles once more, Mr. Tugnutt disappeared round the corner of the house, as fast as certain rheumatic twinges of his permitted.

Down they came, the rain-drops, round and large as a florin-piece, merging rapidly into one tremendous fall of water, deluging the gravel-paths till they looked like tiny rivers—sopping into liquid mud the mould of our trim flower-beds, and ruthlessly dashing to the ground the delicate petals of the roses and lilies. Peel after peel of

thunder shook the walls of our sturdy little cottage, and ceaselessly the forked lightning darted in, illumining our awe-stricken faces with ghastly light. An awful storm. Heaven protect all who were out in it!

And Sir Morton?

Amid the turmoil our ears caught the dinner-bell at the Court.

"Hark! listen!" said Lina. "That shows Sir Morton must be home."

She too was thinking of him, then?

"Not a bit of it," answered I. "If Doomsday had come, that bell would ring just the same. Do you forget, Lina, when old Sir Wilfred died, how his disconsolate widow gave orders for it to be rung as usual? Starched old iceberg that she is! Havering couldn't possibly have known what o'clock it was else, I suppose, and the private feeling she's so fond of talking about— 'private feeling, my good Miss Latour,' goon

Miss Latour!—‘should always give place to public needs!’ That’s always how she talks. Who wants the cracked old thing, I wonder——”

“Netta!” interrupted Lina, with comical reproach dancing in her blue eyes.

“Isn’t it the bell I’m speaking of, miss—to preach us the proprieties and tell us when we’re to——”

“Help! help! Oh! for the good Lord’s sake, come! Miss Netta, Lina darling, come! Help! help!”

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST.

THIS from Dolly, who has burst, pale as a ghost, into the room, and, tugging with both her trembling hands at my skirts, is dragging me to the hall door, Lina pressing close upon me.

“Dearies!” gasps she, pointing over the garden hedge. “It’s Sir Morton!”

“Sir Morton—Havering?” mechanically say I.

“Ay, yes, yes. Lying there all stiff and stark——”

“Weth thet there beast,” adds Reuben,

coming up with his wife, "caperin' about within an inch of his poor bare head; but don't fear for that, Miss Netty, I've——"

"Dead!" shrieks Lina. "He is not dead?"

"The Lord knows," says Dolly, stooping over me, where already I am kneeling beside the prostrate form stretched in the long mudded grass, his face death white, and still as—ah! no, not that. Thank Heaven! as I bend over him, the heavy eyelids slowly unclosed, and distraught and wonderingly the eyes fix themselves on mine, and then the set, pain-wrung lips force a faint smile.

"Not much damage done," he murmurs. "Only a—only——"

Again the eyelids droop, a groan of agony escapes him, and Sir Morton lies unconscious.

Hurriedly dragging off the plaid some

one has thrown about me, I lay it carefully over the drenched and motionless figure, and strive to collect my thoughts; but thinking must come presently, when the injured man is safe from the storm's perilous raging.

How we three women and Reuben contrived to lift him into the house, and lay him on our wide old-fashioned couch, I think none of us could have told afterwards. I remember only that, while Reuben hurried off in quest of Dr. Verity, we strove to restore consciousness to our patient, and that ere we had succeeded the fury of the storm had spent itself.

Sullenly the thunder dies away, and already, with midsummer's caprice, a ray of sunlight smiles through the breaking, swift rolling clouds, and, falling athwart the face on the couch, reveals the faintest tinge of colour there.

His lips move again, and Dolly catches the faint sound they utter.

"It's Malvina he wants to know about," she says to her husband, whose limbs must have been miraculously propelled, for he is already back, with Dr. Verity in tow.

"Malweeny," he says. "Make yer mind easy about her, Sir Morton. The twoad's zafe enough vixed in our stable, and I'm a-going to get her a warm mash. The devil vly away with her vor a——"

"Hush, and get out!" interrupts Dr. Verity, who is already bending over his patient, engaged in a brief examination; then, his face somewhat brighter than three minutes before, he adds, "Nothing more serious, I hope, Miss Latour, than a fractured ankle and a cruel shaking. But these," he continued, narrowly scrutinizing the three female countenances before him—one scared to semi-idiocy, one tearful and quivering,

one—nay, how I looked, I know not, but the doctor beckoned me to his side—“these need good nursing.”

“I am at your disposal,” I said, in a low tone.

“Very good, then get me a candle, and let the rest clear out.”

His commands were noiselessly obeyed, and then, with a few words, and still less fuss, the setting of the fractured limb was accomplished.

“Hadn’t I best be going up to the great house,” whispered Reuben, putting his head in at the door, about an hour later, “and tell——”

“To be sure,” said his wife. “My lady’ll like to know Sir Morton’s took bad, won’t she, Miss Netta dear?”

“By all means, yes, of course,” answered I, the consciousness of her ladyship’s existence flashing back upon me for the first

time. "And, Reuben, ask to see Lady Havering herself, and tell her the extent of the injury."

"My dear young lady," interrupted the doctor, "he can't do that, unless his skill beats mine. I trust that the broken ankle is the worst of it; but Sir Morton is fearfully shaken and bruised, and, if the utmost care is not taken, symptoms of fever——"

"Kindly ask," interrupts a faint voice from the couch, "for a carriage to be sent down."

"What for, my dear sir?" demands the doctor, turning on his patient.

"To take me ho—up to Havering Court in."

"Better send a hearse," grunts our downright doctor, smiling a little, however, at his own grim wit. "Look here now, Sir Morton, if you lie still where you are for a fortnight or so, you know, you'll be pretty

well right again by then ; but if you begin to talk nonsense about moving——”

“Being moved, doctor,” amends his patient with a slight smile.

“Or talk at all, for that matter,” doggedly continues Dr. Verity, “I shall conclude you’re getting light-headed, and act accordingly. See? Miss Latour here endorses what I say,” added he, glancing towards me.

“Certainly,” said I.

“And she is—delighted to have you for a guest.”

But Sir Morton shook his head, and fixed his hollow dark eyes full of wistful incredulity on mine.

“She is delighted, I tell you,” continued the doctor. “Say so, Miss Latour, and then he’ll be quiet.”

“I am very glad,” I said.

And truly I spoke heartily. I think I should have been no true woman to have

coquetted at that moment with the instinct which in men is chivalry, and in women tenderness. It was dominant within me then. A wretched, heartless simulacrum of femininity I should have been, to have stood by and seen the most worthless thing that breathed stretched helpless before me, as Sir Morton lay then, and felt no desire to alleviate the suffering I saw, but the sight of that face, marble pale as some sculptured crusader's, its material beauty heightened rather than marred by the grey shadows of pain,—to look into the languorous lustre of those dark eyes, uplifted deprecatingly to mine, and say I was not glad, with a painful joy, that fate had made it my part to lift the burden of his sufferings, glad that the tender mercies of Lady Havering and her hirelings could not touch him yet awhile—Ah yes, I was very glad of that!

"This lady and her sister," continued Dr. Verity, "are Havering's good Samaritans, and I don't suppose they're likely to neglect Havering's master in his trouble."

"But," once more faintly began Sir Morton ; he paused, a sudden contraction of the pale brows, succeeded by a deep flush, told their tale of what he was enduring

"But," said the doctor more gravely, laying his fingers on the injured man's wrist, and casting a significant look on me, "there is to be no more talking,—good night."

Then he stole out, beckoning me to follow him.

"Listen to me, my dear," he said, when he had noiselessly opened the hall door, and drawn me out into the now exquisitely clear cool night, "Sir Morton has broken his ankle—must have got it doubled up

under him somehow, when the beast threw him, but that's just a local mischief time will set right. The immediate one to be guarded against is fever—don't be alarmed, guarded against, I said, and that's your department; and Mrs. Tugnut may help you, if she can keep a silent tongue in her head, not else. And listen here," added the doctor, "if anybody comes down from the great house to-night, they're not to see him."

"Not Lady Havering herself?"

"Certainly not. The least excitement might be dangerous."

"And if she should insist?"

"Then you can do the same."

"How horribly offended she'll be, Dr. Verity!"

"Not if you tell her you act under my authority, or even——Look here, my dear," he continued, as I smiled rather sceptically,

"which is it to be? a slight passing offence to her ladyship, or additional suffering to Sir Morton?"

"I had rather stand written for ever in her black books, than bring him one breath of that," said I. "So trust me, Dr. Verity. Cerberus shall be a lamb compared with me."

"You're a woman of your word," replied the doctor, with a satisfied nod. "Good night," and he took his departure.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. ABIGAIL.

CLOSING the hall door, and putting up its chain, for nine had now struck from the church tower, and that was late for Havering, I went into the kitchen to find Lina, and explain how Dolly and I were to keep our vigil together over Sir Morton's couch. Literally a couch, which we now hurriedly laid our plans for rendering more bedlike and comfortable.

In her quiet, far-seeing way, Lina was already airing the linen we required, at the fire, which she had stirred into a bright

blaze. There was an anxious questioning look in her face, as she turned for a moment from her spreading about of the lavender-perfumed sheets and pillow-cases. I answered it cheerily, and a flush of warm colour relieved the pallor of her past terror and excitement.

"To think," she says, looking dreamily into the dancing glow, "what might have happened."

"Don't think of it, dear," I answer. "Think rather that he is safe; and we have got to get him well again. Give me that blanket."

"And—what else?" asks she, in obedient tones.

"Why, go to bed, and get some beauty sleep."

"And you?"

"I am going to sit up, as I tell you, with Dolly for company."

"And I had better play humble hand-

maiden outside here, in case anything is wanted?"

"Better go to bed, and save yourself for to-morrow."

"I couldn't sleep."

"Why not?" demand I, almost sharply. "What non——Gracious!—Are they mad or murderers to hammer like that?" for my remonstrance with Lina is interrupted by a frightfully prolonged double knock; and, in terror of a repetition of the clatter, I fly through the hall, and, noiselessly letting down the chain, open the door.

Lady Havering! Pale and gaunt as the Erinnyes she stands before me, and behind her is her maid Sharples—Mrs. Abigail Sharples, while a black mass, which presently takes form of the Havering family coach, shuts out the moonlight, and completes the unwelcome tableau.

"Sir Morton Havering is here," are her

ladyship's first words, uttered in acid sharp tones, as she glides with one swift long stride into the hall.

"He is, Lady Havering."

"Where?"

"In there," and I point to the door behind me.

She makes a haughty gesture towards the handle, and bids me conduct her to him.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Havering, but I cannot do so."

"Cannot?" she echoes, glaring at me in wrathful amazement. "Cannot?—how do you dare——"

"By Dr. Verity's express commands," I reply, swiftly and silently turning the key in its lock, and putting it in my pocket.

"Presumptuous, brazen impertinence! We'll soon arrange that," she says, with another stride that lands her on the con-

tested spot. "Open that door, Miss Latour!"

"Certainly not," I say, walking into the opposite room.

She has no choice but to follow me.

"How dare you!" she imperiously bursts forth then—"how dare you deny me access to Sir Morton? Are you in your senses?" she continues, hysterically.

"Are you in yours," I demand, as calmly as my suppressed indignation will let me, "to be making this disturbance, when absolute quiet is indispensable?"

For an instant her manner changes, and a flash of startled apprehension glitters into her keen eyes.

"Is he much hurt?"

"The ankle is broken, and he is in a great deal of pain."

"Ah!" she replies, with a careless wave of her hand, "that won't kill him."

"I trust not."

"But there is no danger?"

"None which careful nursing may not ward off, I hope."

"Precisely. Well, I have brought Sharples to do that, during his enforced presence in this house. She is a treasure——"

"Doubtless; but it is impossible, Lady Havering—not to-night, that is."

"What!" hoarsely shrieked she, sinking bolt upright into the chair behind her, and grasping her long lean throat with her hand, as though she were choking, "do you defy me to——"

"Dr. Verity peremptorily forbade anyone excepting myself and Mrs. Tugnutt——"

"A creature of your own!"

Ay, that she was, dear, good, kind soul!

"—Mrs. Tugnutt going near Sir Morton until he came again in the morning."

"But Sharples, my"—a strangling fit of

coughing compelled her to pause—"my—own—maid!" she went on at last.

"Not yourself, even."

"This is too much," she gasped, with lips that had grown livid. "I—I——"

"I am afraid you are ill, Lady Havering?" I asked, with unfeigned alarm.

"I am," she said. "I have a severe cold, and I have risen from my bed to come here."

"You should not have done so. There was no need——"

"No need!—no need!" brokenly shrieked she—"no need for me to come and see after your tricks and—and——"

"What do you say, Lady Havering?" challenged I, with rising crest.

"I say, Miss Latour," hissed she, "I want to know how came it that this accident chanced to Sir Morton precisely at your gate—*your* gate?"

"Upon my honour," said I, smiling in spite of myself, "I cannot say."

"Ah, really!" sneered she.

"Sir Morton will, I hope, soon be able to explain that to you himself. In the meantime——"

"You refuse my demand to see him?"

"I do. And, if you see discourtesy in my refusal, Dr. Verity——"

"A common country practitioner, leaguings with two unmarried young——" She stopped short. "Where's your sister?"

"Airing sheets and pillow-cases for Sir Morton."

"Sheets and pillow——Oh, this is too flagrant, too shameless!—it is simply——"

"Pray speak lower," implored I, in trembling apprehension, for all I had taken the precaution of closing the door. "Sir Morton was asleep when you knocked."

"Too flagrant indeed. Sharples!" cried

my lady, going to the door and calling with such strength as she had left (how I rejoiced that it had come to be almost nil!) to that person who stood on the door-mat. "Sharples, come in here," and Sharples entered.

"My maid will remain here for the present, Miss Latour," said her mistress, turning to me.

"What for, madam?" I ventured to ask.

"For?—for! To play propriety, with your leave, young lady. There are appearances to be kept up."

"By all means," acquiesced I; "but I am afraid Mrs. Sharples will find her time hang rather heavy——"

"You will remain here, Sharples," continued her ladyship.

"Yes, my lady," assented the waiting-maid, with such precision that I almost

looked for the subaltern's familiar accompanying gesture of obedience.

"Until after Doctor Verity has been to see Sir Morton again—to-morrow morning."

"Yes, my lady."

"Then you will come up to Havering Court."

"Yes, my lady."

"To report progress."

"Yes, my lady."

Then Lady Havering stalked out, shutting the house-door behind her with her own aristocratic hands, and with a fine imitation of a bang.

A sigh of infinite relief escaped me as I stood for an instant listening to the coach-wheels lumbering crunchingly over the rain-saturated little gravel sweep. How thankful I was that her ladyship's obvious indisposition had im-

pelled her to shift the rôle of propriety on to Sharples' shoulders ! The maid, of course, was sufficient infliction ; but the mistress's presence all night would have been intolerable, and not a little perilous to the absolute quiet on which Dr. Verity had so insisted. Already I feared for the consequence of that turmoil she had created inside the walls of our little cottage, and the dread of adding fuel to the flame had alone enabled me to stifle down my indignant refutation of her absurd inuendoes, bidding me stoop to conquer, and effect a speedy riddance of her for the time being, at all events.

This consummation achieved, I returned for a moment to the dining-room. Clearly the propriety performance had begun, for Mrs. Sharples, having divested herself of her bonnet and shawl, and arranged those articles folded with appalling neatness on

the table, was sitting bolt upright on the edge of the most uncomfortable chair in the room.

"Perhaps you'd prefer to go and sit in the kitchen," said I, with an assumption of suavity I felt not a particle of.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Latour," she replied, with a coarse but still curiously close imitation of her mistress's loftiest style. "Where did you say?"

"The kitchen. It's more cheerful than here."

Mrs. Sharples sighed heavily.

"I say," reiterated I, "that perhaps you'd like——"

"It's not likes or dislikes here below, miss, for we poor worms of earth. It's my dooty, I hope, I look to. And besides, I'm not haccustomed to the kitchen apartments. I have my own private sitting-room up at the Court."

"Ah! well. Then sit here as long as you like; you won't be intruded on. And there's the arm-chair when you feel sleepy."

"I trust I understand my dooty too well to do no such a thing," she replied, irately, glancing at the seductive piece of furniture in question. "It isn't to be supposed that I shall close an eye all night—under the circumstances."

"No? You'll be dull, then, I'm afraid," said I, glancing round for one of our bound volumes of "Punch," but scared from my purpose by some sense of utter lack of congruity between the extremity of his pictured nose upon the title-page, and that one adorning Mrs. Sharples' countenance, and I laid back the well-thumbed volume on its shelf, and pondered whether I should place at her disposal Law's "Divine Call," or the "Saint's Rest;" but Mrs. Sharples had come provided with her own mental nourishment.

"I'm never dull with this sweet volume," she said, drawing a dingy purple cloth-bound book from her pocket, and regarding it with ecstatic rapture.

"Oh!" said I. "That's true, Mrs. Sharples. Open a Bible where one will, one always finds something good in it. Doesn't one?"

"Yes," said she, in a qualifying tone; "but this"—and her accents rose to a triumphant treble—"this is 'Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs' itself, Miss Latour."

"Oh!" said I, catching sight of the book's cognizance, the episcopal mitre on its cover, "I see now. Tate and Brady——"

"Such a comfort as it is in time of trouble, Miss Latour."

"I'm—glad you find it so."

"Always has its little word in season," she sighed, this time blissfully. "Hasn't it?"

“Well, I——”

“Here—just where it’s fell open—no need even to turn over; how beautiful it applies like, to poor Sir Morton’s case; page one, hymn one, verse one.

‘Ow blest is he who ne’er consents
By ill-advice to walk—’

Only put *ride*, instead of walk, and it’s all puffect.”

“Except the rhyme, Mrs. Sharples; ride won’t rhyme with talk—‘profanely talk,’ you know.”

“Rhyme’s a device of man, and isn’t of no account when a mortal soul’s at stake. No, Miss Latour—many thanks to you all the same—but I never did hold with Methody books like them you had in your hand just now. In this hevinly Church-of-England-as-by-law-established volume, is all my support till morning’s light.”

“And you won’t be dull, then?”

"It isn't rioting and dissipation I look to seek in this house—To-night, at all events," hastily amended the lady's-maid.

"Ah, well! Good night, then, Mrs. Sharples, and if you should want anything——"

"I shall want for nothing, sperritual or carnal. I'm puffedekly satisfied."

"Well, if you should change your mind, you know——"

"I shall go to my grave, as I——"

"Perhaps you won't object to going as far as the kitchen-door and asking. I'm so afraid of the noise of the bell wakening Sir Morton."

"I'm not likely to stir till morning's——"

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE SHADOWS.

THE closing of the door silenced for me anything more Mrs. Sharples might have had to say, and I crossed to Sir Morton's room with a sense of satisfaction that the lady's-maid had settled down so unobtrusively, as it were, and without any attempt at interference. I did not by any means regret the few moments I had just devoted to her, and I fervently hoped that the little book she appeared to set such store by, would be to her all she said it was; or, at all events, would act soporifically on those

lynx-sharp eyes. But I had never taken any fancy to the woman; her features bore the stamp of low-bred cunning, and I was in no way persuaded that she really felt the fervour for that manual of pious rhymes her words implied, because I could not conceive an enthusiasm for the cheerless volume myself, and I had never met with it in anybody before. I knew, however, the rigid spirit that ruled at Havering Court, and perfectly understood the necessity of its profession with all who desired to keep well with Lady Havering. She was hardly more harsh in her judgment of the Tractarian school than she was of that little body of Havering Nonconformists who had the courage of their opinions, in spite of her anathema maranathas against them; and the "Pilgrim's Progress" itself was as much upon her ladyship's index expurgatorius as tract XC would have been.

All this, of course, narrowed Mrs. Sharples' choice of devotional literature, and, take it for all in all, perhaps she did wisely in professing to pin her faith on the dreary little orthodox hymn-book. There could be no mistake about it, at all events; but the manifestation of her enthusiasm I had just witnessed, only confirmed my intentions of being on my guard with her.

Taking from my pocket the drawing-room door-key, and turning it in its lock, I carefully closed the door and approached Sir Morton's couch, already converted by Mrs. Tugnutt, during my enforced absence, into a fairly restful bed by means of afore-mentioned sheets and pillow-cases; and now she was seated at the foot, bathing the injured ankle, rising, however, as I entered, to resign her place to me; but I motioned her to keep her seat, and drew a chair beside Sir Morton's pillow. His eyes were wide open.

"Does it pain you much?" I asked, for deep lines seamed his forehead.

"Less than my head does, I think," he replied.

I lightly lifted the clustering dark hair, and laid my hand on his temples; they were throbbing and fevered.

"You have been asleep?" I asked, as I passed my handkerchief steeped in eau-de-Cologne over his forehead. "No?"

"Yes, for a little, but—something woke me up, I fancy. What an exquisite nurse you are!" he added, presently, as the cool moisture eased his pain a little. "You will turn me out cured to-morrow morning."

"Hardly so soon as that, I'm afraid," said I, smiling a little.

"Is she gone?" he asked, after another brief silence.

"Lady Havering? Yes."

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated he, under

his breath. "And she won't come again?" he continued, with a wistful fearfulness, like some child shrinking under the dread of a visitation from "Bogey."

"I fancy not. But in any case she shall not come here, into this room, if you don't wish it."

"That's good," he said. "The sound of her voice always does—'o'erdo termagant'—and somehow now—now——"

"Will you try and sleep again?"

He closed his eyes with a smile, and a more tranquil expression stole over his face's harassed wakefulness. Soon, however, he stirred again, and complained of thirst. I brought some lemonade and put it to his lips.

"Better than nectar," he said, drinking it to its dregs. "Who made it?—you?"

"My sister," replied I, amused at his question—"Isoline."

"Ah ! she who was with you in the lane the other night—Bogslush Lane. That was your sister ?"

I nodded.

"Thanks," he went on. "What a frightful deal of trouble I'm giving you !"

"You will," said I, demurely, "if you talk any more."

He closed his eyes in meek acquiescence with my implied mandate, but for hours it was not to sleep.

"I expect my lady is to thank for this," muttered I, as he lay tossing and turning with feverish restlessness, and murmuring disconnected sentences, generally indistinct, but now and again my ears caught their import.

"A prison !" he cried, more than once, "a downright jail of a place ! Poor wretch !" and he shuddered. "No, hang oneself sooner ! Oh ! certainly, I beg your pardon,

quite a pleasure—if you wish it. Shall it be Tillotson to-night? Or—ay, just there—where the big wild-rose clump grows—and—Isoline did you say? That's a pretty name—Isoline—I-so-line."

The sound of it seemed to lull him to a brief rest, and for a while he lay still, with a calm half-smile upon his lips, but presently they tremblingly broke forth again.

"Dust and ashes!" he muttered. "Corrupt and abominable, with no good thing in us. And this world—be not deceived, brethren—is a dismal den—a dismal den! Come out of it—come away!" he cried, suddenly lifting himself on his elbow, and convulsively clutching my hand, which lay grasping the arms of the chair, in which I sat anxiously watching his troubled rest, and speculating whether I ought to send and ring up Dr. Verity.

"The boat's moored under the tree. See

what diamonds the moon's making on the ripples. Come away—come—hark, there's music! Come—away—away!" And so his fingers lightly wound about my hand, where he had drawn it on to the coverlet, he fell into a quiet sleep.

Not the slightest inclination to drowsiness oppressed me. Dolly, with her fingers in the very act of wringing out one of her bits of linen, had fallen fast off into the land of dreams, and, save the breathing of the two sleepers, not a sound broke the silence. For how long I sat I know not, scarcely daring to look round me, much less stir, for fear of hopelessly disturbing the hard-won sleep of Sir Morton.

I was glad of this silent vigil; it afforded me leisure for thinking quietly over the events of the last few hours. For me they made a strange, almost startling break in the sameness of our life. Then my outward

eyes fell to considering the actual scene before me, and the contrasted picture presented by the two sleepers—Dolly, with her mouth cavernously wide open, and her head adorned with a gigantic frilled nightcap, would have enchanted a Hogarth or a Wilkie, while a Velasquez would have yearned to transmit to his canvas the beauty of the face beside me, almost as white as the pillow on which it lay, and cast into striking relief by the dark hair, and the moustache, which was, however, not heavy enough to conceal the mouth, at once noble and frank, and whose expression lent a glory to every feature, endowing the clear-cut brow with a sweet intelligence. Every line of his face was eloquent of that priceless human attribute which the Italians call *simpatica*, and which speaks at once to the goodness within, let the faults be as they may.

Like some Sir Bedivere of old romance, or

that crusading knight, his own ancestor, who lay on the alabaster tomb in Havering church, he looked at once so brave and gentle.

A face with a story! So it should have been. A tragedy, perhaps, or—well, well! and then I smiled to think how prosaic by comparison his wandering words had been. His delirium should have raved of moated castles, and rock-chained damozels, at least. What blood-chilling revelations should have broken from those parched and fevered lips, and all the burden of his complaint had been that Havering Court was a dull place. Why, so it was indeed, under my lady's régime, we needed no fever imp to proclaim that! Truly he had been something nearer the ideal I had established for him, when he had hinted, in his dreamings, of that bright home of his at Maggiore. Italy! Her very name called up in me such sweet imaginings. I thought yearningly, then, as times out of

number I had done before, what my poor brush and pencil might be charmed into doing, among her mountains and her pergole, her azure waters and bright-hued flowers, her grand grey old streets, her ancient churches, with their solemn chanting and gorgeous ritual—oh! me, the glamour of such dreamings! How powerfully it held me now!

A slight, involuntary movement of the hand imprisoning mine recalled me to myself, and I made an attempt to withdraw my fingers, but they were not yet free, and so letting them be, my fancy wandered away into new channels created by the slight change in its position of my hand, on whose third finger the great emerald in the ring which had been a family heirloom of the Latours for generations, now just caught the rays of the carefully-shaded lamp. The gem gleamed

out in the surrounding chiaroscuro with a strange solemn brilliancy, bringing me many a memory of the dead, and of my childhood—mine and Isoline's—through the shadows and the silence. Utter silence! The whole household save myself wrapped in sleep. Her curtain fallen, never a doubt of it—even on the propriety performance in the next room yonder; for I strain my ears to catch a sound in that direction, and not a movement, not a cough, hints of Mrs. Sharples' presence there. The clock on the mantelpiece softly tingles three. Close then on dawning, but that the curtained windows will keep out yet awhile. Hush! what is that? a footstep! nay now, but what absurd fancies this witching hour of the twenty-four does conjure up in lonely watchers! A footstep indeed! A cracking, perhaps, of some stupid chair or table, or a mouse behind the wainscot. The cat, I know,

was mighty busy investigating that little hole down by the door all yesterday morning. Hush ! hark ! cock-crow at last, and hu ! —how cold !

The low faint sigh at the birth of a new-born day breathing round the house, chills me through and through, and, with my free hand, I shiveringly draw my little knitted shawl about my shoulders, and glance towards the window.

Through the green blinds a faint streak of daylight penetrates now, and, catching the dead white of the lace curtains, refracts with a pallid ghastly luminosity upon the door, creating there a strange—optical delusion, is it ? Surely yes ; for cannot I swear to having closed that door with the extreme of care, in order to exclude all possibility of the faintest sound ?

Yet now it stands ajar !

Appears to do so, of course. And, if I

were not the prisoner I am, I would pretty soon set my fancies to rest. As it is, I only look away, angry with myself that a few little hours of watching should have so disordered my faculties. Indeed, indeed, must I confess it? my head is a little dazed; and I lay it back to recall such common-sense as it may ordinarily be possessed of. My eyelids are heavy and aching, and droop painfully in spite of my best efforts. Yet I fight off the insidious sleep that strives to master me, coming a lame conqueror out of some hideous nightmare dreaming, which pictures to me the gaunt features of Mrs. Abigail Sharples peering in at that door, her cunning, pale-lashed eyes gleaming like corpse-candles in the spectral bluish-white halo around, and fixed on me where I sit beside Sir Morton. An ugly, meaningless vision; and to disperse it I sit up, and, vigorously rubbing my eyes, look again.

Ah ! thank Heaven for that gleam of warm red sunlight that has come to spread its moted haze athwart that very spot ! For very defiance sake I would like to pass my hand up and down the lintel yonder, but it is a prisoner still in that other hand whose touch no longer burns mine, like tight hot bands of iron, but is relaxing cool and moist, until with a little ingenuity I succeeded in disengaging my fingers, and quietly and restfully the sleeper slept on.

Then at last, stealing across the floor, I examine the door. Fast shut, of course. What fools of our mad senses we are ! moralize I, as I step out into the hall and peep in at the opposite door to find how it may be faring with the veritable flesh and blood Mrs. Sharples. Wearied, no doubt, by her arduous rôle, she has succumbed, and is fast asleep. Apparently very fast asleep indeed ; for though I approach her

with some bustle, and call her, by name, as loudly as other considerations permit, she does not stir by so much as the quivering of an eyelid. First closing the door, I return to her side, and let fall a book at her feet. No result.

“Mrs. Sharples!”

No answer.

“Mrs. Sharples! Mrs. Sharples!” and then vigorously—I trust it was not savagely,—I shake her by the shoulder. Striking and touching instance of the depths to which somnolency may reach! How interesting to mark the languorous reluctance with which she sets about leaving the arms of the sleepy god. A slow semi-opening of the pink eyelids (is it my distempered fancy that sees such a keen cunning thread of light between them?), then they close again. A stretch, a yawn, a wider jerking of those drowsy lids, a start of confused surprise—

why, all this was Nature itself, if it was not exquisite art!—and utterance at last.

“Oh, gracious! Miss Latour mem, how you did startle me, to be sure! Quite brought my heart into my mouth, so to speak.”

“Had a little sleep, Mrs. Sharples?”

“A heavenly one. Innocent as a babe’s.”

“Caught after all!”

She started.

“Napping, you know,” laughed I.

“Oh, hem!” and she coughed with a relieved air. “Well,” she replied, in quite charming confusion, “to think, now, how I was overtook. But we are all of us mortal, in a manner of speaking, ’ere below.”

“Pray don’t apologize. I only just looked in to ask you if you heard anything—well, some ten minutes or a quarter of an hour ago?”

“Heard anything? My gracious me!”

“Or—saw anything?”

“And me sleeping here as innocent as the unborn cherubim. Oh, mem, Miss Latour, you don’t think it’s burglars!”

But, as Mrs. Sharples puts this startling query with such smooth tranquillity, I feel re-assurance on my part is superfluous, and I only say,

“I think—I *hope* it was merely my fancy.”

“I’m sure, indeed I hope so too. How may poor dear Sir Morton be now, mem?”

“Asleep,” I reply curtly.

And leaving her, I return to my watch.

CHAPTER IX.

“DAMMI ANCOR.”

THE clear sunbeams, breaking next morning over the steaming refreshed world, strove in vain to pierce the closed blinds and curtains of Lady Havering's chamber. She lay in her gigantic catafalque of a bed, fighting painfully for the breath, half stifled in her by a sharp attack of bronchitis and cold, which, already hanging for some days past about her, had been seriously aggravated by her previous night's expedition. To stir from where she lay, as she expressed a wish to do, would, Dr. Verity assured her,

be an act of suicide ; and when, croakingly, as some ancient raven, she strove to explain that her presence at Cliffe Cottage was indispensably needed, he flatly declared to her that, on the contrary, it could gladly be spared.

“Had you been able,” he added, “to go ten times over, I should have forbidden your doing so, on Sir Morton’s account. He needs absolute quiet, with absence of all disturbing causes”—“at which my lady,” said Dr. Verity, when relating to us the conversation which had taken place, “looked black as one of yesterday’s thunder-clouds,”—“absence of all disturbing causes, and new faces.”

“New faces! Really, Dr. Verity——”

“Fresh faces, then, my lady,” said I. “They’re not good for him, and the ladies at the cottage are all that can be desired.”

"I hope so, I'm sure," sniffed her ladyship; "but they are young, doctor," she added, more sweetly, "and——"

"That does not render them less desirable——"

"And good-looking," interrupted she, "according to some tastes."

"Oh! handsome," said I. ("I'm not afraid of turning your heads, you see, my dears. It's only an old fogey's opinion after all.") "And so much the better, my lady," I said; "a man in your nephew's condition needs everything of the brightest and pleasantest about him. Brings a fellow through, you know, in half the time your old parchment-skinned Gamp sort of—— By the way, your ladyship's woman—I found her at the cottage this morning. What the deu—ten thousand pardons, what the mischief—I mean,—what is she doing there? When she ought to be here attending on you."

"She is at Cliffe Cottage by my orders," haughtily said her ladyship.

"But she's a superfluity, and just now superfluities there are a nuisance."

"Society's statutes are seldom superfluous," says she.

"Oh! ah! Just so!"—"You see, my dears, I began to see what she'd got in that head of hers, and I said no more. But if society dooms you to have that hatchet-faced duenna about the place, don't let Sir Morton see too much of her. It mightn't be good for him. She's an excellent person, no doubt, and I hope she'll prove herself useful, for hang me if she's ornamental. How's Sir Morton now?"

Already, on his way up to the great house, Dr. Verity had looked in at the cottage, and found Sir Morton in a less satisfactory condition than he had anticipated.

"He's been over-excited, or you haven't

kept the place quiet, or something," he said, hurriedly, as he went away. "I will look in again on my way back."

Then, before he saw his patient again, I told Dr. Verity what had occurred after his departure on the previous night.

"Well," he said, with a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes, "that's a misfortune which won't happen again. And if my lady dies of her present indisposition, she'll only have herself to thank. But she won't; she's as tough-skinned as a rhinoceros, is Lady Havering, as likely to live to a hundred as anybody I know, unless any accident should happen to do for her before. Still she won't be able to leave her bed for a good three weeks to come, that's quite certain. So we must be thankful for small mercies."

"You can't be in better hands, Sir Morton," he said, as he took leave of his patient. "One of these little fingers here," he went

on, lightly lifting my hand, "is worth a dozen heads of my sort in a case like yours."

And we did our best to atone to our invalid for Lady Havering's thoughtlessness; but all our care could not shield him from the fluctuations of pain and unrest which such mischances as his bring with them. For some days he lay, neither permitted nor indeed able to speak; gentle as a child, patient and uncomplaining as ever captive was.

One fine afternoon, however, saw him, by the combined exertions of Reuben and Dr. Verity himself, wheeled on his sofa under the shade of the mulberry-tree. It was, he said, a blessed change to feel the free soft air, after the darkness and confinement of the room; and then, after a while, we drew him on to explain how his accident had arisen.

Malvina, it appears, had been skittish

from the moment of being taken from her stable. She had, however, conducted herself moderately well on her outward-bound way; only on their return, when still about two miles from Havering, the first lightning flash had sent her careering all over the road—"a performance," continued Sir Morton, "which she repeated with every fresh flash."

"And they," shivered Isoline, from her own particular nook in the old tree's knotted bole, where she was occupied in the important duty of twiddling Scamp's ears to keep him quiet, while I sketched him for about the ninety and ninth time—"they were continuous."

"Almost, Miss Latour. Still I contrived to keep her fairly in hand, till we neared your gate. Stranded in port ! or almost—for just then there fell one blinding flash of forked blue light, striking into the grass not

two yards before us. The poor terrified brute leaped upwards, sprang forwards, dashed with a thud against something, and then—the rest,” concluded Sir Morton, “you must tell me, for it was a leap into the dark as far as I was concerned, and as for Malvina, I don’t rightly understand yet whether she was hurt.”

“Not a hair of her, Sir Morton,” said I, “an hour after, she was munching in her box with all the unconcern imaginable.”

“True to the sex of her,” he said, with a little smile.

“Oh, Sir Morton. Quiet, sir!” but this is to Scamp, who is convulsively cocking his ears at the cat, where she is taking her afternoon airing among the flower-beds.

“I am dumb, Miss Isoline,” he says, turning his dark eyes upon her, and letting them linger dreamily there. “Truth should not always be spoken, should it?”

"But that was not truth—you spoke just now," sturdily returned Lina.

"No? Well, I spoke it out of my little experiences," he replied, with a light sigh, and a faint shrug. "Such as they have been, I mean. Such as they are, simply make the exception that proves the rule; and I never can repay the goodness you and your sister have shown me."

"We could have done no less," I replied, "by the merest——"

I hesitated, on that verge of ungraciousness I seemed so perilously near.

"Beggar, stranger, you were going to say," prompted he, "and do you imagine I don't know that? Perhaps I value it so much the more on that very account; holding as I do," he continued, with a malicious twinkle under the long lashes, "that it clinches my argument with hoops of steel, that there are women and women."

"There can be only one sort of—woman," said Isoline, sturdily.

He fixed his eyes on her in amused expectation.

"I have always conceived their varieties to be endless," he said.

"Oh! of course, in temper and talent and all that. Outside—as one may call it; but, at heart, one always."

"But then half of the fair sex have none," contested he, still smiling.

"I don't know anything about the 'fair sex,'" she said, with a slight toss of her head, "you were talking, I thought, of *women*."

Had she come off conqueror in their little word-contest? Perhaps, for he was silent for a few minutes; then he said,

"You must forgive me, Miss Latour. Mine has been such a lonely bachelor life. Motherless since I was a little child, sister-

less always, am I so frightfully to blame if women have seemed to me mere company dolls or animated statues? Animated!—good heavens!" he groaningly added, "when I think of what must be!"

"What is this inevitable of yours, Sir Morton?" I asked.

"My incarceration in Havering Court till this foot of mine is in working order again. To think that in ten days more I 'may go home,' as Dr. Verity euphemistically puts it. Must go, he means."

"No, Sir Morton," said I, in a low tone, and that quivered in spite of myself—"not must."

"Absolutely, Miss Latour. The decree of the unseen sibyl, borne to my ears by that visible Gorgon. How rejoiced you will be to see the back of Mrs. Abigail, to be sure! At least, if—but perhaps you admire Mrs. Sharples?"

"Not particularly, Sir Morton," laughed I.

"Lady Havering does," he said, gravely.

"She's a useful person, I daresay, up at the great house," said Lina.

"Quite my aunt's double, and if a multiplicity of Lady Haverings is an advantage, then by that ruling her ladyship is justified in calling her an acquisition. I hope she has proved herself so here, Miss Latour."

"Really, Sir Morton, there has been absolutely nothing for her to do."

"Nothing! with a load like me upon your hands!"

"You have not been an exacting invalid, excepting once."

"And that," he challenged, "was when——"

"Well, Dr. Verity might call me to task for even referring to it."

"Be careful," he laughed. "If you don't

satisfy my curiosity, it is sure to bring on a relapse. Come, Miss Latour, having said so much, you must confess all. Tell me, when was I unreasonable?"

"I did not say unreasonable."

"Exacting, then."

"Nor that quite either. You made a sort of condition, that's all."

"Did I?—when?"

"Well, the night when—your pain distracted you a little."

"When I didn't know what I was saying, in short."

"Perhaps not quite."

"And I said——"

"‘Don't let her come near me, that Sharples.’"

"I was explicit in the matter of names," he said, in rather a vexed tone. "I hope she wasn't by."

"I can't tell."

"Can't tell?"

"She wasn't in the room, if you mean that, but——"

"But what?"

"She has 'a habit of overhearing,' I sometimes fancy."

"Then she heard a truth for once, for in full possession of all my senses I never uttered a sincerer——"

"Hush!" said I, looking round.

"Well, I don't like the woman," he said.

"The reason why I cannot tell,
But I don't like thee, Mrs. Abigail.

Will that scan for a rhyme?"

"Better, perhaps, than her setting of Tate and Brady." And then I told him of our conversation in the dining-room.

"What a hypocrite, though!" he laughed, when I had done.

"Not necessarily, Sir Morton."

"Oh, yes," he said, doggedly—"it couldn't

be, you know. Nobody ever did yet attain to an enthusiasm for that distortion of——" He paused and looked at me in half real, half assumed dismay. "Supposing she should think proper to read some of it to me, for my spiritual edification, when she has me in her clutches at last up at the house—my aunt is sure to instal her head-nurse—how I shall pray for speedy recovery then, Miss Latour!" and once again his gaze wandered to where the evening sun glinted down an aureole of golden light about my sister's bending head. "When I find myself outside Paradise in——"

"A higher circle," said I.

"You can afford to be satirical," he said dismally. "You are not the destined victim. To Hades, I was going to say. You know how Virgil puts it——"

"Indeed we do not, Sir Morton," hurriedly disclaimed I. "We are not blue-stockings."

"Tant mieux," he said, lazily.

"But what does Virgil say?"

"Ah! well. Only that there are degrees of wretchedness down in—those infernal regions. And vividly enough he paints the pangs of the doomed; but, in my humble judgment, the cruellest can't touch the hideous picture of Lethe's sunless, lightless banks, with their utter monotony and dun colour, where hope is an unknown word, and love a meaningless one. Imagine it, can you?"

"I can't," shivered I. "It's too terrible to contemplate."

"Yet thither I am bound," he said, melodramatically.

"To Hades?" cried Lina, looking up with a mischievous glance. "Indeed, I hope not, Sir Morton."

"To Havering Court, Miss Isoline. They are convertible terms. You cannot gainsay

me," he challenged, turning abruptly on me.

"I am no authority," I replied, a little stiffly. "I am only Havering Court's drawing-mistress."

"Psha!"

"Not on its visiting list."

"The more fortunate you then. But now, you will come? You and—your sister?"

"By whose invitation, I wonder?" said I, smiling at the notion.

"By mine. Why do you shake your head? The place is mine—is it not?"

"Oh! yes."

"And I have a right to invite my own—friends. And you," he went on, earnestly; appealing from one to the other of us, "will not refuse me. You could not be so unkind. You could not find it in your hearts to do that."

"I—think we should."

"But why?"

"Because—indeed we could not, Sir Morton."

"Just a woman's reason!" he said, biting his lip.

"You will have to be content with it."

"Then you are incarnations of inhumanity after all," he said, in a lighter tone, and from which the slight tones of surprise and vexation had nearly fled. "You save me from a violent death, to hand me over to a living torture of dulness and ennui. What's the use of pretending it isn't?" he added, desperately.

"You can escape from it directly your ankle is well," said Lina.

"You want to get rid of me?"

"Only for—your own sake, Sir Morton," said she, flushing.

"Mocking me again. You are cruel—really cruel," he said.

"To be kind, then," she replied, crimsoning deeper and deeper under the eyes so fixedly watching her. "You said you were anxious to be gone from Havering."

"Where I have been so happy—happier than ever I was in my life—in my life," he murmured.

"Where you are bored to death."

"I never said so."

"You must not be contradicted," she replied, rising from where she sat, and shaking the leaves she had been busy pulling to pieces for the last half hour, from her lap, while she fixed a dark crimson rosebud, which drooped in the bosom of her dress, more securely in its place among the muslin folds of her fichu. "You have the invalid's privilege of——"

"Talking nonsense, and being humoured to the top of my bent. Will you give me that rose?"

"Which?" she said demurely, glancing round our parterre of old-fashioned pinks, and pansies, and cabbage-roses, and, with cheeks that rivalled their colour, keeping her blue eyes persistently on the blowsiest of the array.

"That one you have in your dress."

"Oh! Yes," she said, coming beside the couch, and, disengaging the bud from her lace, she placed it in his hand. Then she hurriedly turned to go.

"You are coming back?" he asked, as he took the flower.

"I think not. I am going in to make the tea, and then—you will have to think of coming in. The dews are heavy."

"Then we can have some music?"

"If you will."

"And what I will?"

She smiled a bright assent.

"'Danmi ancor' then, to begin with."

"How fond you are of that," she said, flushing a little.

"Are not you? I have heard you play it so often, when I have passed by Cliffe Cottage."

"As if one could hear all that way off!" laughed she.

"Quite enough to make me wish to be—where I am now. 'Dammi ancor,' then, you will?"

"Yes, Sir Morton."

And so, with Scamp barking and pirouetting among her skirts, my most complaisante sister goes her way.

CHAPTER X.

A VERY OLD STORY.

SIR MORTON gazed after her until the last glimpse of her was hidden. Then the light faded out of his eyes, and he turned his head wearily upon his pillow.

"You are in pain again?" I asked, noting the change.

"No," he said, "not pain exactly, unless—— Good heavens! how glad you will be to be rid of me! What an abominable, fretful, fanciful animal a piece of broken bone can make of a man! Such a weak, contemptible, egotistical coward—mental

coward you know, as it has made of me!"

"You call yourself hard names."

"Not half hard enough. Two little weeks ago I could endure, I was resigned——"

"To what?"

"To my life. You smile?"

"Yes, to think how many hundreds envy the life of the master of Havering Court. They don't see in it a shadow 'as big as a man's hand.'"

"There you have it," he rejoined, quickly, "for the shadows bring their sweet golden lights with them, which no cloudless sky, no waveless sea can ever know."

"You are ungrateful. Think of your wealth,"—he sighed—"your talents——"

"Dry sticks," he said, smiling cynically, "that lack one spark to turn them to account—one spark of human sympathy in

• them," he added, in reply, perhaps, to my puzzled look.

"That, I suppose, you might have for the asking," I said.

"Indeed! Where?"

"Why, here in Havering."

He glanced up eagerly into my face.

"The tenantry," I went on, "the schools, the cottages."

His face fell again.

"They want my money," he said, "and they have it; if they want more, there is my aunt up at the——"

"But your personal interest. If you were to live among them——"

"My dear good friend, that is just the very thing I shrink from. Think what an inhospitable dog I should seem to—the present occupants, if I were to ask them to turn out."

"But why need you do that?"

"Upon my honour," he said, with an unfeigned shudder, "you hold out a nice prospect. I fancy solitary confinement in a condemned cell would be almost preferable to this little arrangement of yours for me ; to say nothing of my presence being burdensome to the ladies. And I hope I may be acquitted of discourtesy if I own their society would be intolerable to me. Think of it—Lady Havering with her sermon-books, and that poor, half-witted girl."

"Be careful how you utter such sentiments as those up at your house," said I. "You should have found out before this that, in Lady Havering's estimation, Ursula is all that is charming."

"Poor woman !" he said, gently. "Is it possible ? I wonder how even a mother can so delude herself ! But I believe you are right, Miss Latour ; for, only the morn-

ing of my accident, she was saying to me what a valuable acquisition her child would be as a wife. I could hardly credit my own ears."

"She has thirty thousand pounds, Sir Morton."

"Is that your creed, Miss Latour?"

"It is the primary clause of Lady Haverling's, I fancy."

He was silent, and lay with his eyes closed, not stirring even when Lina brought out our cups of tea. Thinking he slept, she set them down quietly, and went indoors again, and presently the grand harmonies of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" swelled softly out upon the air, fragrant with the scent of summer flowers.

The last sunrays faded, and the young moon shone out in the deep clear sky, and still I mechanically stitched on at the piece of work I had taken up on Scamp's declin-

ing to "sit" any longer; almost fearing to lay it aside, lest even so slight a movement should disturb the sleeper. But my thoughts were very active; they turned on that fast-approaching moment which was to take Sir Morton Havering out of my life, and I loathed it. Three days hence, and all would be as it had been three weeks ago. All the even tenor of our lives would flow back again; things would be as they had been before. No, no. Never again! To me those peaceful days would come never again; for in my heart lived that now which it had never known before, and which would never leave it again till it ceased to beat. Love—deep, abiding, unconquerable love for Morton Havering.

There it had risen up, and there I cherished it. To have bidden it begone, and leave me the old peace and content, would have been as mad as to bid the tempest be

still, and I bowed to my fate. I saw that no other could have been mine. To be thrown, as I had been, into daily, hourly companionship with him, and not to have worshipped him with all the devotion my soul was capable of, would have shown me an unmovable living statue, not a sentient woman. Mine might or might not have been an impressionable nature, but I do not think it was an inflammable one. There were one or two would-be admirers, such as do generally flutter around every passable-looking young woman, who resented my indifference towards them, and envious spinster gossips asked of each other, who was I that I must needs find my straight stick in the wood? These same suitors were too good for me, that they were, and deserved something better than being flouted. I do not think that flouting and politely refusing to join one's destiny with anybody

who may choose to ask for it are synonymous terms. I was not aware of possessing three ideas in common with those Corydons; and, without any advanced opinions on the subject of women's rights or wrongs, I valued my freedom too highly to surrender it for the mere end of attaining matronly dignities, and being taken in to dinner before poor Miss Ariadne Elderflower; and I think, had I met and parted with Sir Morton Havering twenty times under ordinarily existing conditions, I might have troubled my head with hardly so much as a second thought about him. It was not possible that he could have seemed to me other than a pleasant companion, a handsome gallant gentleman, a man assuredly high out of the ruck of his kind, and there no end; but in the weakness of him I had come as it were to know how strong he was. His dependence upon the willing help of those

about him, had brought out, as years of perfect health could never have done, his unselfishness and patience; and mind and heart of him seemed to me worthy indeed of the goodly house they tenanted.

But why should I seek to justify that which needs no apology? Would my memories were as unsullied as my love was for him in those early days of our acquaintance, when I cared not to look beyond the present, asked not, nay, even desired not, any requital. He was to me a thing apart, the ideal fulfilled of many a past waking dream. A hero, and yet a mortal man, with all a mortal man's quaint characteristics and mental lights and shadows. No King Arthur, blameless and above the weaknesses of his fellows, but still a hero, a knight "*sans peur et sans reproche*," "*Loyal en tout!*" and I looked at him as he lay there in the gathering shadows, and

knew that, come what might, he would always be justified of his brave old motto. Long I looked at him, and, looking, strove to think how there had been a time in my life when I had not known,—and loved him. A time when his name was simply one to me among a thousand others, and now how sweet and precious the poor little letters that made it up!

Higher and higher the moon rose in the cloudless blue, until her rays spreading athwart the old tree, cast a halo of soft unearthly light over the pale face of Sir Morton. A tremor thrilled me as I gazed. Perhaps the hot day's heavy moisture was beginning to chill the air overmuch? and I rose and carefully drew the great discarded couvrette higher about him. Lightly as I did it, he stirred, and opened his eyes, not, I fancied then, as if they had been heavy with sleep all this while.

"Thanks," he said. "It is growing a little chilly."

"Time for you to be going in," I said. "I will call Reuben."

"Let Reuben wait a bit," he said, lifting himself on one elbow, and stretching out his other hand to me. "I want to say something to you first, Miss Latour."

I went near and laid my hand in his open palm.

"If," he said, lifting it to his lips and kissing it, "I had a golden reliquary, I think I would ask for this."

I started, and the hot blood rushed to my cheeks.

"And worship it," he went on, "for the gracious saint-like thing it is."

"But how could I spare it?" objected I, with an uneasy laugh, and faintly striving to withdraw it.

"How indeed?" he asked, still detaining

it, and gazing at it with a speculative smile. "Why, if I were that mighty philanthropist you have been telling me I ought to be, I should bid it go and do for others as it has done for me. But then—What was that?" he paused and glanced round.

"I heard nothing, Sir Morton."

"But then I spoke like the selfish Sybarite creature I am," he went on, "and my first thought was——What the mischief is that rustling in there? Master Scamp, I expect, with some fresh victim," and he glanced towards the shrubbery that ran in a semi-circular sweep a few feet from our little encampment.

"No," said I, "Scamp is guiltless for once. He's indoors with Isoline."

"Isoline!" echoed he, relaxing my hand: "What's to become of me when that sweet music of hers is dumb, for all I can hear it. There! Hark!" and a bright smile broke

over his face, "'Dammi ancor!' she promised me, and she keeps faith."

"Of course she does," returned I. "She wouldn't be Lina else."

An infinite content shone in his eyes. "'Dammi ancor,'" he murmured. "That scene of scenes! when Gretchen stands in the moonrays, an angel of purity and light, among the dew-bathed flowers. Poor child! What a hideous story!"

"So faithful to life as it is," said I.

"The world seemed to her a Paradise of love and truth!" he went on, dreamily.

"For one blessed brief time—ay," I said.

"And then it turned to gall and hate and such utter misery. And yet," he added, "malice was not triumphant after all. Eh? The good conquered."

"When hearts were broken. Yes."

"Don't sigh like that," he said, with rather a forced laugh, "as if things were

not wretched enough in this real work-a-day old world,—for me. Self again, you see! You may find the moment which brings that fearful prisoner's van of a coach to carry me off, a jubilant one because——”

“ Indeed——”

“ Don't shake your head, because it rids you of a troublesome guest—but I—come, give me one grain of consolation. Tell me I need not say ‘*lasciate ogni speranza*’ when I leave Cliffe Cottage. I may hope, may I not? Tell me that,” he pleaded, earnestly.

“ Hope!” murmured I, “ I—I do not——”

“ I may come and see you—you and——” and his voice fell—“ and Isoline—let me say that this once.”

“ But you will be running away from Havering altogether, I expect,” I said, evasively, “ directly your foot will let you.”

"If I do it will be as a banished man. You——what on earth is that noise? Who's there?" he demanded, in loud, imperious tones.

No answer.

"It is the wind stirring the branches. Shall we go in, Sir Morton?"

"And leave what I was going to say still unsaid? Well, let it be then, for the words I want to thank you and your sister in, for your goodness to me, our dull Anglo-Saxon never coined. Yes, let us go in, and we'll have 'Dammi ancor' again; and after that—well, my hours are numbered, so treat me like those old sacrificial victims, and heap me up with delights till the terrible moment comes. Yes, we will go in, and a fig for the future!"

CHAPTER XI.

BY THE PALE MOONLIGHT.

THE rest of that evening there was not much said between the three of us. Generally so animated and cheerful, Sir Morton lay silent to-night, with his eyes fixed on Lina, where she sat, playing one after the other the pieces which by some strange intuition she had come to know he cared for. Music was a passion with him. Unable to play a note himself, he yet knew the characteristics marking the compositions of each master, and was gifted with a delicate ear for those exquisite modulations

of sound which Lina, beyond all players, professional or amateur, I ever heard, knew how to call forth. This is no fulsome partiality. People, competent to judge of her powers, had said as much; her execution might be faulty when she attempted one of those excruciating acrobatic finger performances, whose simple sweet old ballad motif offered an excuse for ten minutes of deafening clatter, but that was less from physical inability to conquer the chaos of chromatic runs and frantic syncopations, than from the fact that, their difficulties conquered, they gave her no pleasure. In short, "*le jeu ne valait pas la chandelle*," and she confined her attention to the fountain heads of classical and operatic work pure and unadulterated. Not everybody's taste, this, of course, but it was Lina's, and, to judge by the face of Sir Morton when she played, it was his.

Still less inclined to talk am I. That would be to burst asunder the brief spell of intoxicating happiness still left to me. I feel like one in the ecstasy of a blissful dream which a mere breath might destroy. The music, the soft lamplight, the fragrance of the flowers upon the table, affect me with such unutterable sense of mingled pain and pleasure that my brain begins to whirl, and my eyes are so dim and misty that I lean back in my chair behind the screen up in the room's darkest corner to recover myself.

Then I bethink me that the cool air outside will perhaps bring me back my ordinary reserve of common-sense, and nerve me to face—what? What are the coming days to bring? And so, with the intention of taking a turn in the garden, I rise, all unperceived by the other two—it would need an earthquake to bring them

down from their seventh heaven—and step out on to the verandah.

As I stand for an instant looking up to the silver bright moon, a shower of rose-petals, white as snow, falls about my feet, then a low but stealthy rustling sound, and, with swift, startled motion, a woman's form flits past me. The tell-tale moon's light falls full upon her face, the vinegar, crafty one of Abigail Sharples, and I civilly bid her good evening in a voice whose key I take care to pitch high above the soft piano chords inside the room I have just left. Mrs. Sharples returns my greeting somewhat flurriedly, despite the smooth oiliness of her tones, and further is at the trouble to explain that she has "taken the liberty, the fam'ly being gone in, of coming out to see the gardin flowers."

"But you can't see them. It's dark," object I.

"Oh! don't say it's dark," reproaches she, "with the moon like day, Miss Latour, and the place looking like, if it isn't profane to say so, a little hevin below."

My prosaic remark shrinks reproved into nothingness by this poetic view of the matter. Mrs. Sharples is right.

"It quite does your eyes good to look at such flowers," she goes on, gazing ecstatically round. "Mr. Tugnutt was telling me they beat ours at the Court."

"Thanks to his care, Mrs. Sharples. And what, since you have such excellent taste——"

"Oh, mem—Miss Latour—" modestly deprecates she.

"What do you think of the white roses here?"

Her eyes fall shiftily under my steady gaze.

"Oh!" she replies, "see—seeing as the

family was sitting inside, I didn't make so bold as to——"

"Nor," interrupt I, saving her soul that perjury—"nor the famous old mulberry-tree on the lawn?"

"Mul-berry-tree—lawn!" stammeringly echoes she. "Deary me, now, where may it be, miss—?"

"Just by the shrubbery—the laurel-shrubbery; you know where that is, Mrs. Sharples?" and, stepping down on to the path, I confront my face with hers.

For an instant her eyes meet mine, stare for stare, then they turn blinkingly under their skimping pink lids to follow the direction of my hand, lifted to point at the mass of green, gleaming metal bright in the moonshine.

"You know the laurel-shrubbery?" I repeat, a semi-tone higher.

"Oh, dear, no—yes, leastways. I 'ope I

know my possishun better than to introod, when the family lives, so to speak, in the gardin. And is the mulberry-tree near the laurel-shrubbery?" she artlessly inquires.

"Within hearing distance, Mrs. Sharples."

"Sure now. What an exquisite nutshell of a spot your 'ouse is, Miss Latour! Well, as I say to my lady often and often, beauty and 'appiness dwells in the 'umblest cottage—not, of course, to be personal, Miss Latour,—as much as it do in the Court; and her ladyship she says, 'Ah! Sharples,'—she does talk so hevinly, does my lady—'ah! Sharples.' And then I feel as if I could do anything for such a Christian woman as her, so meek-'arted and 'umble-minded as she is, poor dear, for all she stands so 'igh, with all her affecshuns set on——"

"Bow wow wow!—bow—wow, wow, wow wow!"

"Oh, that there brute of a dog!" shrieks

the waiting woman, clutching her skirts high above her boots, and rushing blindly into my pet geranium-bed. "I can't abide him. That I can't."

Conscious that Scamp reciprocates her sentiment in full, I make a plunge at his irate wriggling body, and succeed in capturing him; and Mrs. Sharples is left to recover herself, and pursue her nocturnal ramble in peace.

The music in the drawing-room has ceased, and I can hear the sound of Sir Morton's voice, and Lina's low response. Shall I step in again and join the conversation, or—shall I go and consult with Dolly touching the state of our larder, and whether leg or shoulder of lamb will go best with those carp the gardener has just brought down with "Lady Havering's kind love to Sir Morton"?

Second thoughts are best, so wise heads
say, and I spend the next half hour with
Mr. and Mrs. Reuben.

CHAPTER XII.

“WE!”

THAT may be sound advice which counsels “the speeding of the parting guest.” Still to my ears it always carries a cheerless, inhospitable ring, but never so cheerless as on this, Sir Morton’s last day with us; and it is with slow hands I set about collecting his few belongings that have accumulated during his stay at Cliffe Cottage.

“But I am housekeeper,” says Lina, taking from my hand some trifle I am putting with the rest. “Let me do this, and

you go and sit with Sir Morton. It isn't polite to leave him all alone the last day."

"Go yourself then," I reply, bluntly. "Sir Morton won't object to you for a substitute. He'd rather talk to you than to me—I expect."

"He is very fond of you, Netta," was her comment on my not too graciously uttered remark.

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to him."

"Netta! is anything the matter?" she asks, with timid wonder in her tone.

"What should be, child? There, go and talk to Sir Morton."

"But——"

"Oh! for pity's sake leave me. Go away."

"And you'll come soon?"

"As soon as—I'm wanted," I reply, with a bitter laugh.

Then I put on my bonnet, and, stealing out through the little orchard gate, hurried on by the churchyard path, along the river banks, with steps that never once paused to ask why they had come there, until I found myself in St. Grimwold's wood. But after all that was no great wonder, for the place was a favourite haunt of mine. If I had any superstitious dread of it, it was of a sort that attracted rather than repelled me, and certainly it was a rare refuge for setting one's thoughts in order, with its dim shadow and far-off rush of water. No wonder that world-weary old monk had fled there, even away from the gentle brotherly affection of his convent comrades. Brotherly affection! Perhaps he misliked those words. Perhaps they irritated him with their calm significance. Perhaps the utter solitude and speechlessness of the place were more endurable than the

passionless monotony of his convent duties. What had been the hidden mystery of the man's life, what bitter blighting experience had driven him to come there, and bury his past, and at last to lay himself and his old withered hopes and aspirations down to die—all alone?

Well, he did wisely. Of what use are such joy-killed creatures as he cumbering about the world, except to make kill-joys to others' bliss, and to remind them in their hey-day that they are mortal? And then, since there stands that "canon 'gainst self-slaughter," what else to be done but eke out life in death, creep away as the wounded brutes, and bide the end. "Ah! he was a wise man in his generation, that old anchorite!" I thought, as I stood looking into the empty grave. An enviable one, even, in his way. For he had not to keep a cheerful face to the world as we poor

nineteenth century wretches, with hearts sore to bursting, have to do. A grand thing to be able to look the misery one felt! No such privileges as that now; we must face the world, and fight it with its own weapons, and run case-hearted all in one groove to our journey's end, never letting our glances be seen, that look yearningly towards some blessed by-way, where, but for this or that, we might have found our solace from the workaday old world's burden and heat.

Anon, maybe, will come by those others for whom happiness is meant, those for whom life's joys are perhaps so brimming over that they hardly know how full their measure is, and carelessly trample half of it under foot. And for the rest—well, look you, as that heartsick prince said, and this old monk said:—"I'll go pray."

But the sun is high. Those good people at

home will be wondering what has become of me. What on earth *did* I come here for, I wonder. To moralise and fret over a bright dream, causeless as ever dreaming was, when it would have more become me to be footing it along the high road yonder, rejoicing in something that a little bird——
 "You, Ursula?"

Of all people in the world to stumble upon Ursula Havering! "Here?"

"Yes," she says, stolidly, with a half shrinking, half defiant look in her dull eyes.

"Why do you come—here?"

"Why shouldn't I?" she demands, with what seems to me, for her, preternatural sharpness.

"Really, my dear," I reply, rather taken aback. "It's a free way certainly, but—you're alone?"

She nodded her head.

"Come alone?—all the way?"

She nodded again.

"And Lady Havering knows?"

This time she varied the movement of her head by a shake.

"But do you think you ought—"

"Ought what?" she says, with a disagreeable laugh.

"To come so far beyond the park?"

"I hate the park."

"You know how much Lady Havering dislikes your leaving your own——"

"It isn't my own, and it isn't hers. It's Sir Morton's; and I hate it," she reiterates.

"Because it's Sir Morton's—eh?"

"No," emphatically says she. "He's nice. I like Sir Morton."

"Ah!"

"Everybody does. Don't you?" she says, fixing her strange eyes on me. "They say you do," persists she, when she finds my answer not instantly forthcoming.

"Who says so?"

"Lady Havering." Ursula rarely, if ever, called her "mother." "Is it true?"

"Quite true."

"But you oughtn't, she says, because I am to be Lady Havering."

"You mean, you'd like to be."

"No, I shouldn't," she says, disgustfully.

"I don't like the name a bit."

"Not Sir Morton's?"

"Oh! that's well enough; yes—but the other, it's her name, don't you see?"

"Your mother's."

"Lady Havering's."

"Is that why you don't like it?" I ask, with irrepressible curiosity.

"Yes."

"But she's your mother, child," I say, in a tone of mild reproof.

"I daresay. It doesn't make her kind to me. She's very cruel."

"Ursula!"

"She is," persists the girl; "she scolds me, and she'd beat me too, only she thinks I'd tell, and so I would. I'd tell him all."

"All?"

"Yes—don't stare—you know what I mean."

"Indeed I do not. Perhaps you don't know your——"

"Oh! don't I? Oh, ho! Don't I!" she cries, with a slight flush suffusing her sallow cheeks. "I'm not an idiot, I suppose."

"My dear——"

"I'm as clever as you—that is—no, and I'm not near as beautiful, but——"

"My dear, I'm not beautiful."

"You are. I think so. Prettier than Isoline your sister, though she's pretty too, I like her. She spoke so kindly to me once, when I met her. Just as you do, and as he does—but you're the best of all.

I'd like to come and live with you, Miss Latour," says the heiress, in the hungry, shivering tones of some homeless street waif. "But she wouldn't let me do that," she continues, looking round with a cowering glance; "if she knew I was here she'd half kill me. And talking to you too, ho! Why, she hates you, and Isoline too, but she hates you the worst, I think. I'm not quite sure why, but she does. Good-bye," and she held out her cold heavy hand.

"But, Ursula——"

"Well, what?" she says, impatiently, and casting another glance round.

"Tell me. Why does she—you know whom I mean——"

"Yes, yes."

"Why does she scold you? I hope you don't do anything wrong."

"I don't know," she whimpered, "but I can't help it."

“ Help what ? ”

“ Oh, you know. I've tried, indeed I have, though she calls me an obstinate ungrateful, awful, wicked—oh dear, indeed I've tried, but he won't, I don't think he can, you know. I don't believe it's his fault somehow, for he's very kind, only——”

“ Yes, yes ? ”

“ And I'm quite sure it's not my fault, because I've tried ever so hard. Sharples has crimped my hair till my head smarts, and you should see the dresses I've got from London, tied in ever so tight, and yards and yards long, but it's no good, and I've played ‘ Robert, toi que j'aime, ’ with variations nearly every night, three times over sometimes, and I've shown him——”

“ Sir Morton, you mean ? ”

“ Of course I do—shown him all my portfolio full of drawings. It took two whole hours one night ; Lady Havering had to put

off ringing for prayers till we'd done, and I can't do any more, and I won't, that's another thing. But she oughtn't to say I haven't tried. I couldn't have tried harder if I'd wanted ever so much."

And Ursula's sobs came thick and fast.

"Wanted what, Ursula? Won't you tell me?"

"Wanted to marry him—stupid—as if I did! any more than he wants to marry me. I don't want to marry anybody, I—I—take me away!" she cried, throwing her arms about me. "Take me away," and tears of agony rolled down her cheeks.

"My poor child!"

"That's what he says," she murmurs, drying her eyes, into which a watery gleam of comfort breaks. "He's so kind, I've missed him awfully. Why, if he hadn't been so good to me, I should have been ever so glad if that dreadful accident had killed

him. Then she couldn't have bothered any more——"

"For shame, Ursula!"

"What for?" sturdily demands she, "when I say I was sorry. Why, didn't I cry all night when they brought word up to the house what had happened to him? And if it wasn't that she'd always be worrying so, I wish he'd come and live at the Court."

"You know he's coming back to-morrow?"

"Is he?" and her face grew blank.

"Aren't you glad?"

"I—don't—know," she stammered.

"Would you be if you were me—I mean, you know?"

"That's a foolish way of talking," objected I.

"Don't say that. It's as bad as calling me a fool, as she does. You don't think I am that, do you?" she pleaded, piteously.

"I think, dear, we're all as God made us."

"So do I," nodded she. "But she doesn't—Lady Havering—She thinks I can be made into something else. But I can't—I can't. Where are you going?"

"Home."

"That sounds nice. To Cliffe Cottage. He's there, isn't he? I know he is, because she's always saying he oughtn't to be. She's in a fine temper about it, I can tell you."

"Well. He's coming back to the Court to-morrow."

"Is he quite well, then?"

"No, not yet."

"Then why do you make him leave you? I thought you liked him."

"We do, Ursula, but—"

"Well?"

"He must do as—he thinks proper. And

you'll take care of him, won't you?"

"Oh, dear ! dear !" moaned she. "She'll make me amuse him—play ' Robert, toi que j'aime ' all day, I know she will. Oh ! it'll be dreadful," and her eyes began to brim over again with self-pitying tears. "I'd run away, if I knew where to go. I'm so miserable !"

"Ursula, you say you like me a little."

"Not a little. Ever so much."

"Then you'll do as I tell you, and go home like a good child."

It was hard to realise she was more than that, and that in age I was barely three years her senior.

"I'm going," she said. "I never do stop here long enough for her to catch me."

"But why do you like coming here?"

"I don't particularly—only it's better than the park. I hate the park."

"Well. You told me that before. But

this place, don't you know they say it's haunted?"

"Oh, that's nonsense. I don't believe in ghosts," she says, with a strong-minded air. "You don't either, I know. It's only silly, ignorant people who do that, isn't it?"

"At all events," evasively replied I, "I'm the only ghost, I fancy, you'll find hereabouts. Come—since we'd better not go together, supposing you go first. Good-bye."

"Kiss me," she said. "Nobody ever does that. Won't you? Don't you like to?"

Had I disliked it ten times more than I actually did, I would have done it.

"I've so often wanted that," she said, with a satisfied air, when my lips had touched her poor blurred cheek, "but I've never dared—not before her. Good-bye,"

and then her squat, heavy feet tripped quite lightly away through the winding path, till the trees above hid her from me.

"So, my lady, it is as I thought," soliloquised I, when in due time I too turned homewards. "You think lucre will buy hearts, do you? Not hearts of such stuff as his are made of, I fancy. But we shall see, we shall see."

It did not strike me that I had been overmuch missed, when I presented myself again under the old tree. There was a glad light in Sir Morton's eyes as he greeted my re-appearance.

"While you have been gone, we have been—" *We?* "—arranging all sorts of things," he said.

"Ah! may I venture to ask——"

"Well, for one thing, we've been planning a pilgrimage to the sunny south."

"That," said I, glancing at Lina, absorbed

in watching the joyous capers of Scamp after his couple of hours' absence from her, —for he had condescended to accompany me,—“That is no novelty. It has always been one of our castles in Spain.”

“Italy she means, doesn't she?” he said, with a mischievous glance at Lina.

“We,” I went on, with the uncomfortable sense of being an outsider in their joke, whatever it was. “We have made the expedition a hundred times in the spirit, Isoline and I.”

“And now,” said Sir Morton, with all the confidence in the world, “the more material part will go too.”

Once more he stole a glance at Lina. She smiled and said nothing. I laughed uneasily, and shook my head.

“And why not? You are coming, I tell you, to Villa Riva.”

“That is your home.”

"On Maggiore, so please you."

"And it's all settled, is it?" said I.

"All quite settled."

"And what," I asked, glancing at Lina, where she sat blushing crimson as the roses in her white morning dress. "What does Mrs. Grundy say to this delightful plan?"

"What do you say?"

"Oh, it's perfect, of course."

"You really approve?"

"Why not?"

"Well, you see, you're the only Mrs. Grundy we care two straws about."

"*We* again!"

CHAPTER XIII.

“FOR HER SAKE.”

NEXT day Sir Morton returned to Havering Court. Precisely at the appointed hour, the coach, which I think we could hardly have more dreaded, had it been a guillotine tumbril, drew up with Lady Havering herself inside. Risen for the first time from her sick-bed, my lady looked a dismal janitress indeed for her still invalided guest. Her words to me were short and formal, and she expressed no acknowledgment of what we had been able to do for Sir Morton, but that we

could easily spare. She chose to assume that Sharples had had the entire charge of him. So much the better.

As for Sir Morton, he went meekly, almost cheerfully, to his fate. If I thought over-cheerfully, considering all his professions of dislike to the existing régime at Haverling Court, I drew my own inferences, and waited for Lina to speak ; but several days went over, and she hardly so much as alluded to him.

Had I been mistaken then ? Was my own innermost conscience the only real source of conjecture that he had come to care for Lina ? Gone so far, perhaps, as even to declare his affection ? I began to fancy this must be so, when the days dragged to their ending, and Isoline, making no sign, fell tranquilly back into the old, eventless routine.

To me, now that he was gone, the house

seemed the very citadel of dulness and ennui. Her life he seemed, after all, to have influenced, no more than the skimming of a dragon-fly ruffles the pool's surface. Truly, she continued to play, to the exclusion of all besides, the music he had best cared for; but then, as I reasoned, that was natural enough, since both were musical enthusiasts, and his taste in these things so entirely accorded with hers. So I chose to account to myself for the sounds that one evening, nearly a week after Sir Morton's departure, stole to me through the twilight where I sat in the old spot, lonely—not as once, ere he came, alone, and contentment personified, but most indescribably lonely and desolate.

Three weeks ago, I had never a care worthy the name; to-night, with fevered, passionate yearning, I strove to picture to myself him who had so lately lain there

under the spreading bough canopy. What a difficult, and yet what an easy task! Now every line of his features showed as vivid to my imagination as if my eyes still saw him, next instant all grew blurred and indistinct, speaking only too truly of the times that could never be more. Two, three weeks, a month hence at latest, and Sir Morton would be gone from Havering. The place—had not he said so himself?—was disagreeable to him. And, supposing he had chosen to remain, who was I that we should ever meet? Nay, reasoned the pride of me, but there, at least, was no discordance. The Latours were well-born as the Haverings; but the wealth? That, Ursula Havering might bring him. Would he, after all, I wondered, stoop to buy it at its price? For the beauty that so “many men desire,” and hold such diverse opinions about, I looked in the glass and saw a pair of brown,

shining eyes, a wealth of dark hair, features not ill-shapen, but pale, and only telling fitfully of the life within. But what waste of time to set about appraising one's personal appearance, when all its value rests with those who look on it. So much it is worth to its possessor, not a jot more—or less. And, if I strove to estimate my looks then, vanity it was not, but the effort to see myself as others—or another might see me.

And to what end? Ah, me! Poor weak woman! Vainly I strove in the old avocations and interests, sad or joyful, of those about me, to drown the haunting, bitter-sweet memories. In vain I summoned pride to wrap itself about the heart I had deemed so invulnerable, and which I found had so humiliatingly yielded ere its surrender had been sought. Given away unasked! The thought maddened me. If anything could have aggravated the misery I

felt, it was the utter serenity of Lina, whose indwelling content seemed daily to increase. Whether I more pitied or envied her, I knew not. Sometimes it seemed to me I would have given my existence to have been again the happy, indifferent creature of old days—to have possessed a particle of Isoline's supreme composure. And yet there were moments then, when, coming suddenly upon her, I used to find her, my industrious, busy Lina, literally doing nothing but gazing before her, as though she saw some vision too bright and sweet for words to tell of; or as often sewing away for dear life, crooning all the while some quaint old love ditty to herself, as a happy bird will sing for pure enjoyment of existence.

Sometimes I felt for her a contemptuous pity, hugging to myself the bonds which I was powerless to break, and felt that not

for all the universe had to offer, would I part with the hopeless, mad passion dominating my whole being. Only at one thing I found myself able to rejoice, that it was I and not Lina who was suffering this torture which allowed of no crying aloud. Had it befallen that she had seen Sir Morton with my eyes, come to hold him as I did priceless, what misery past her fragile power of enduring! Then as quickly the parallel failed me altogether, since, in my pride of heart, I held hers to be a nature of utterly different calibre from my own. Shallower, less capable of that grand passion which, if it were anything, love must be to me.

Meantime the weeks passed. The bulletins which reached us of Sir Morton from the Court grew daily more favourable, until one morning Dr. Verity, looking over our hedge, said Sir Morton was about again, and able to walk a little. "And no end of

a bother I've had to keep him from doing it before this. He seems in a vast hurry to be on the move. Oh! you may smile, Miss Jeannette, but it's a dismal cage, is the great house. Good morning."

And the doctor trotted on.

Late one summer afternoon, Sir Morton appeared at Cliffe Cottage. It was, he said, his first move outside the pleasure precincts.

"I have been mewed up," continued he, as he sank into the rustic chair I placed for him, "like that poor starling who couldn't get out." Then he glanced round him with an air of friendly recognition at every object, while Scamp greeted him with boisterous ecstasy.

"He's glad to see you again," said Lina, apologetically.

"And you are too?" he asked, turning to me.

"Of course."

"But it is not such a non-sequitur," replied he, with a glance at Lina, "for see how your sister has not a word of welcome for me."

A bright flush dyed her face.

"You know," she said, "how glad we are you are able to come."

Then, in sheer confusion, she rose and went out.

My astonished eyes turned from the closing door to Sir Morton. He looked the incarnation of happiness, and was gazing tentatively at me.

"It is like a dream," he said, "to think she is really mine."

My heart stood still.

"Do you know," he went on, "that there were moments when I thought of asking you to be my special pleader with her?"

"If," faltered I—"your words are so

eloquently unmistakeable to me of your—
your regard——”

“My love,” amended he.

“Your love for my sister—what would
they be addressed to herself?”

“That shows,” replied he, “how blessed-
ly ignorant of love’s pangs your own heart
is. You do not know what fools we make
of ourselves in the presence of those we
love. You look so stern, Miss Latour.
Does that mean that, if I had asked your
intercession, you would have refused me?”

“Refused—you?” mechanically echoed I.

“Ay—yes. See now; to me she seemed
like some shrined Madonna——”

“Who, in the flesh, was just a woman,”
said I, with a cold sarcasm for which I
hated myself: “not a piece of marble.”

“No,” he said, “bless her gentle heart;
but all the while so strangely calm, so self-
collected, so alabaster fair and pure, men-

tally and physically, that in her that old tale of Pygmalion seemed to be telling itself backwards. It was so hard to conceive she was of mere mortal flesh and blood."

"With a heart of common clay——"

"Ay, to spare for such as I am."

"Surely you rate yourself too meanly."

"No," laughed he; "that has never been one of my shortcomings."

"Well," said I, "it is not her fault if——"

"Fault!" he echoed, fiercely. "She hasn't one in the world."

"The fewest woman ever had, certainly. And I say she is not to blame if she seems cold."

"Who said she seemed so?" he cried, rising to his feet. "You mistake me altogether."

"Then equally," I replied, with composure, "I might mislead your cause."

A half mirthful, half shy smile curled his lip.

"You are, then, an advocate of the proverb that 'Heaven helps those who help themselves.'"

"In such matters, yes."

"You would have wished me success, at least?"

No answer.

"Say you would have done that," he pleaded, earnestly.

"Why do you say *would*, Sir Morton?" challenged I, blindly dropping the water from my brush all over my sketch. "Lina is as free——"

"Indeed she is not," he said, gleefully, drawing from his breast-pocket a tiny Morocco case, and taking from it a magnificent hoop diamond ring, "if promises and vows go for anything. Do you think," he went on, placing the beautiful ornament on

the table before me, "she will like it? Is it her taste, do you fancy?"

I shrank back from the glittering bauble as though it had been some venomous snake.

"I—this—I do not understand," I stammered, deadly chills paralyzing me from head to foot.

"No, indeed," he said. "Poor child! Sister——"

I sprang to my feet.

"How should you?" he went on.

"But I do—I do now. You have stolen——"

"Nay, asked and won. Be generous."

"And she," I moaned, "has told me no syllable of this!"

"Like the good, obedient little woman she has been," he said, proudly. "Oh! Jeannette, indeed I think my little love is stronger-natured than you give her credit

for. See now, I told her—I begged her not to tell—our secret to you.”

“For shame, Sir Morton!” Then I burst into a storm of sobs. “How could you, to me—me! Lina and I, who have never had a secret between us! Oh! you have been too cruel!”

“To be kind. Listen, child—listen now; don’t judge me harshly, hastily. For your sake, for her own, I implored her to be silent till to-day. Don’t you think it must have been a task almost beyond her strength, this that I imposed on her? Well, she said it was, poor darling, and she refused. Only, when I urged that it was for your sake, I wrung a consent from her, a willing one in its way, at last.”

“I cannot see——”

“Can you not?—can you not? You, who”—he paused and coloured a little—“are acquainted with my aunt’s—peculiari-

ties! Can you not see that, if her suspicions of an engagement between us had been roused, and she had chosen"—he hesitated again—"well, you know, to be annoyed, for any reason."

"And there might have been one," said I, softening a little.

"Just so; that is," flushed he again, "Lady Havering has her fancies, and—and——"

"Ambitions."

"Such as they are," he said, modestly. "And, in short, if she had come here making any—well, giving you any annoyance——"

"She would not have known your secret any more for my participation in it," said I, ruffled.

"Ah! do I need words to tell me that? But she does come to know things in a most surprising way. One would fancy she was

ubiquitous, or had a second pair of eyes."

"Which she keeps in another person's head."

"What do you mean?" he said, quickly.

"I think," evaded I, "that, under the circumstances, you acted for the best."

"You credit me with so much?"

"Honestly I do. I believe yours was the only course left, if we were to be saved from the premature criticisms of her ladyship on your choice."

"Had she come," he continued, "your mind was in any case a *tabula rasa*, and you could have referred her to me. Oh! I can see your dark eyes looking my lady into nothingness!" and he laughed quietly to himself. "Well, it would not have been the first time you had battled for me. You're a powerful champion, Jeannette, and I want you always on my side. So come, will you

forgive me, and like me a little, for her sake?"

"For her sake," murmured I.

And so, taking up the ring, he bent over me, and gently kissed my forehead; then he was gone in search of Lina, and I, spreading my arms upon my spoiled pictures, hid my face, and, with that kiss burning into my brain, wondered why death did not take pity on me.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THERE'S NOTHING HALF SO SWEET IN LIFE."

I DID not see Sir Morton Havering again that evening. I suppose he stayed on until the inevitable dinner-bell knelled his departure, for soon after it had done ringing Lina entered the room. If she found me figuratively clothed, and in my right mind, it was on that same principle that Hamlet says: "A man may smile and smile, and be a villain."

"No lamp yet?" she said, as she came in.

"Very well for you, miss," replied I, holding out my arms to her through the

shadows, "that it isn't lighted, for I wonder what colour your cheeks are. Come here."

And she came, and, seating herself on the footstool beside me, lifted her sweet warm face to mine, and bade me kiss her, and from my heart I did, twice and thrice.

"God bless you, child," I said, "and make you worthy of—each other."

"He said he had told you, Netta," she replied, after a little silence. "And you are really glad? Why, darling—tears?"

Thank heaven! Yes, at last. Had she known what they were to me, she would not have so earnestly bidden me "not to cry."

"There now," she said, when I grew calmer. "You were so much surprised?"

"Surprised! As if falling in love with you were anything surprising."

"Oh, nonsense!" said she, with a little

shame-faced laugh. "I can tell you I was astonished."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed. Oh! Netta, if I were good enough for him; but—it should have been you. Do you know, once or twice I fancied it was, and——"

"And," hurriedly interrupted I, "when were you undeceived, my dear?"

"The day before he went away. Don't you remember you took yourself off for quite two hours. Goodness knows why and where. By the by, where did you go, Netta?"

"Where? Let me think. Ah! St. Grimwold's way."

"And why—just then?"

"How should I know? 'A truant disposition.' Never mind. And so it was then, was it? And Sir Morton, he threw himself at your feet——"

"Don't be ridiculous, when he couldn't stir."

"And said—what did he say?"

"Why, that he—oh! Netta, I don't know what he did say, except that—oh! Netta, what could he see in me to care so much for? So much, do you know, that——" She paused, and then, in a low, almost awe-stricken voice—"he said life without me would be worse than death to him."

"And is it the same with you?" I asked her.

She made no answer, but stole her hand into mine, and clasped it tight.

"Is it the same with you?"

"It is all too much happiness," she murmured, with a long sigh. "Netta, it terrifies me. I think I could bear misery better."

"You know nothing of that, dear

child. Pray heaven you never may."

"That voice would make your fortune on the stage," she said, lightly. "What a grand tragédienne you would have been, to be sure! He often says so: He admires you immensely, I can tell you."

"Who does?"

"He—Morton," she murmured, shyly. "Oh! I'm awfully jealous sometimes—I am indeed. Don't shake your head and smile in that sepulchral way; and if it wasn't for his motto, 'Loyal en tout'—what a glorious one it is, Netta, isn't it? Fancy it belonging, though, to that wet blanket of a Lady Havering! She doesn't deserve it a bit," rattled on Lina. "Hers ought to be 'Noli me tangere,' oughtn't it? or 'Touch not the cat, but a glove,' or some disagreeable thing of that sort."

"I wonder," said I, "what she will say when she does hear of this. She ought,

"NOTHING HALF SO SWEET IN LIFE." 205

of course, soon. I suppose you'll be married some time next year?"

"I think—this—year."

"Oh, really. That's settled too, then—the wedding-day."

"No, of course not. What nonsense you do talk! You're worse than he is. He says it's to be October."

"This being August. And what do you say?"

"Ah! well, December. But Sir Morton calls that an age."

"And to me it will pass like a day. Am I to lose you so soon, Lina?"

"Lose me! My dear, as if you were not coming too!"

"Where?"

"To Maggiore with—us."

"Indeed, no," said I, emphatically.

"Oh! but yes, yes; you, and Scamp, and——"

"Scamp must elect for himself; for my part, I cannot come."

"Not come!" she said, turning her eyes, wide open with astonishment, on me.

"No," replied I, stroking back the silken soft hair from her upturned brow. "Young Darbys and Joans should be left to themselves, and not have old maid sisters coming the duenna over them."

"What rubbish you do like to talk!" said Lina, bridling. "As if you weren't likelier to be married now before I am."

"Really," and I laughed in spite of myself; "and who is to be the happy—victim?"

"Oh! half a dozen. There's Squire Thornfield, and Mr. Glastonbury, and——"

"I'm not a polygamist, child."

"Well, you know very well what I mean. If you want to marry——"

"But I don't, and I never shall. What amuses you?"

But my sister was not exempt from the awful selfishness of people in her circumstances, and had fallen five fathoms deep again in her own blissful ruminatings.

"I was only trying to picture my lady's face when she hears of our engagement. What a study it will be! You might draw it, Netta."

"I have no genius for the appalling in art," said I. "But I shall be glad when she does know," I added, more seriously.

"Well, and she does know by this time, for Sir Morton said he was going to tell her after dinner. Why do you look so solemn? Lady Havering can't kill me."

"No," said I, catching her cheeriness. "Nor even forbid the banns, of course."

"Well, then, please don't hang her over our devoted heads like a Damocles' sword, there's a darling."

"May she prove a blunt weapon, if she

ever falls. Gracious ! your bread's burning to a cinder, child."

"Oh, dear!" cried Lina, "I quite forgot——"

"Of course you did," I said, rising to go and see the extent of the mischief, and carrying with me into the prosaics of life that burden which could be lifted—nevermore.

CHAPTER XV.

DEAD ROSES.

ISOLINE'S engagement, when the rumour of it oozed out, was less a nine days' wonder than a nine days' talk; and congratulations, honest and heart-felt, poured in upon her. If any thought Sir Morton had made a *mésalliance*, the opinion was confined to the patrician mothers of county misses, dowered and destitute alike. These certainly did not spare their animadversions on that blind and pig-headed eccentricity which had taken unto itself a pauper with just a passable enough face—"that is, you

know, not absolutely plain," and a wretched pittance of a hundred pounds a year. In the van of these disappointed matrons, I had naturally expected to find Lady Havering, but the outbreak I had so dreaded spent itself silently.

"She never said a word," said Sir Morton, when he came next day. "Not too sympathetic of her, was it?"

"A golden silence! Not a single word, do you say?"

"Not a single word. Nor there wouldn't have been so much as a glance up from the worsted cockatoo, if her needle hadn't chanced to snap in halves at the moment."

"Ah!"

"How I detest that bird! Where's Isoline?"

"Coming in a minute. And so her needle broke, did it?"

"Yes. And beside that all-absorbing

catastrophe my little interests paled to nothingness. Well," he indulgently added, "perhaps, you know, the cockatoo's claims on her are superior to mine; for what am I to Hecuba, or she to me, that——"

"Your aunt, Sir Morton, and her daughter is——"

"My cousin. True, oh! Sibyl. So they are, by the ties of blood; if any such crimson tides through their veins, which sometimes I almost dare to doubt. But blood is not Alpha and Omega, and I love your little sister better than all the Haverings, quick or dead. Why do you turn away now, Netta? Does that mean that, after all, I am not forgiven yet? Is the woman who was an angel of pity to me, not a month ago, going to be relentless now? Look up in my face, dear,—so, that's right,—and tell me you do not doubt I will cherish, heart and soul of me, the treasure I have won."

“How can I doubt——”

“God knows, Netta, how truly I love her. I who—when I think of my great happiness—of the lonely life mine has been——”

“Who was answerable for that, I wonder!” cried I.

“My kind destiny,” he said, “who shielded my heart’s love, garnering up all its store for her—for her! So come, now, Jeannette—sister, lay aside that busy brush, and spare me this little hand. You will not? What has come to you? Have I offended you really?”

“Indeed no,” said I, and I rested my brush on my easel’s ledge, and stretched my hand out. “What fancies!”

“Very cruel ones,” he returned, taking it. “When I think how this tended my sick whims so patiently and gently a hundred times.”

And, still with my hand in his, he stood for a little scanning my face.

"How awfully pale you are," he said.

"You're not looking well."

"I am very well, Sir Morton."

"Morton," amended he. "You'll have to get used to that."

"I'll try, Sir—Morton."

"Listen to me now, Jeannette, I know how it all is. You have worn yourself to a shadow, sitting up of nights to nurse me."

"Indeed no."

"But you have. When I think what a tax I must have been upon you, I—almost wish that lucky misfortune of mine had never happened. How was it," he added, suddenly, "that Isoline never relieved guard with you over me for so long?"

"She played her usual part—the silent one."

"And did nothing," he said, with a vexed air.

"For shame, Sir Morton. Lina who is such a busy little woman, too."

"Ah! but she wouldn't for me!"

"She was a hidden agent, always at work for you."

His eyes brightened, and grew eagerly attent.

"Not a scrap that passed your lips then was ever touched by any hands but hers—for all Mrs. Tugnutt is no mean cook. Never a flower of those you used to say, you know, gleamed like hope-stars in the darkened room, but she arranged for you. Always thinking and busy for you, Sir—Morton. Always doing, never heard. That is the nature of her."

"So quiet, isn't she—so——"

"Undemonstrative, that is what people

say of her, I know. Yes,—well, quiet, certainly, almost to a fault.”

“Fault!” he cried, indignantly. “Her greatest charm, they mean. It is just that calm repose about her——”

“Like the still waters that——”

The opening of the door interrupted my venerable simile, and Lina’s head, adorned with her old straw garden-hat, looked in.

“At last!” cried her lover, dropping my hand, of which he still retained a careless, unconscious hold, and hastening towards her. “Why, you are all wet!” he added, dragging off the hat, and smoothing apart the damp rings of hair about her forehead.

“It’s raining,” she said, drawing off her great garden-gloves.

“And you’ve been out in it!”

“Oh, half under cover. Then you *didn’t* see me?” she added, in a tone that seemed

to endorse some half foregone conclusion at which she had arrived.

"See you!—how should we, when we have been here this last quarter of an hour?" he replied.

"I know you have. I was outside there all the while, clipping off the dead roses, poor darlings!"

"We didn't see you."

"No," she said, with the faintest echo of pique in her tones, "I'm quite sure you didn't—you were too utterly absorbed—but I saw you."

"And heard too, I suppose, naughty child?" said Sir Morton, with a glance of mingled amusement and vexation towards me.

"No, indeed, that I did not. Don't you see the window's hasped?"

"That's well," he said, heaving a sigh of mock relief, "for listeners never do hear any

good of themselves—do they, Jeannette?"

The slight flush on Lina's cheeks seemed to portend just one of those small tiffs that are the very food of engaged lovers, and, with a smile and a little shrug, I left them to enjoy it.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE REV. SWITHIN GLASTONBURY.

LADY HAVERING remained a problem to me. Time flew, till leaves began to lie sere, and Lina and I were beginning to get busy over the trousseau, and still no evidence of what might be passing in my lady's mind regarding Sir Morton's engagement reached us.

Sir Morton himself expressed his total inability to shed light on the matter, since Lady Havering had persisted towards him in the silence she had maintained at his first intimation, and, with that natural bent

of his towards getting as easily as might be through life, he would declare it to be "a very good thing too—for the present, that is," he would add; "only one of these days we"—how pleasantly, somehow, that little plural pronoun always fell from his lips!—"we may be wanting the place for ourselves, and as it is past controversy that we should not make a happy family all under one roof, I shall have to give her ladyship due notice to quit. It's a job I don't half care for, though, I must say—a sort of ungracious one, look at it how one may. And there's no hurry, for the little Maggiore house will shelter our unprotected heads through all next summer—won't it, *'lustrissima Signorina mia*?"

And then Lina's eyes, luminous with bliss, would, like poor Pauline's, picture that fair Italian home, and look their glad assent.

None the less, Lady Havering's silence

fretted me ; the more that I had received from her no intimation for the renewal of Ursula's painting lessons. True enough, they were to have been in abeyance during Sir Morton's stay at Havering Court ; but then her ladyship had never contemplated his being a fixture, or, at least, under such conditions as the present.

If only, I thought, Lina had received my lady's congratulations, couched in the most formal or the sourest terms, my mind would have been more at rest. And yet why did it matter ? She was not Sir Morton's keeper. And seeing that he was full ten years ahead of being an infant, even in the eyes of the law, and much about as sane as other mortals who are held to be free and responsible agents, to whom was he accountable for his actions besides heaven and himself ? If her ladyship did not like the choice he had made, why then she must be pleased

not to like it. Sir Morton, in any case, was not the man to part with all that was dear to him through fear of the acid of a woman's tongue, even had she poured it on him, that I knew. But it was a natural source of congratulation to him that he was not pestered with it, that I saw. And so, day after day, the two lovers lived on in their golden dream, troubled little enough about Lady Havering.

We had never met her face to face since she had fetched home Sir Morton from the cottage. There had been some attempts on his part to induce Lina and me to call at Havering Court, and pass through the awful ordeal of a formal introduction, under our new conditions, to Lady Havering.

I suppose abstractedly this Mahomet-going-to-the-mountain proceeding would have been the right thing to do; but my lady's demeanour towards us had been al-

or rather Lady Havering's, conception of worshipping in the "beauty of holiness." She countenanced no such ritualistic innovation, as she called the vicar's proposal for pensioning off our ancient clerk, who had held his post through half a century, into an honourable retirement; and he still piped forth his challenge to the handful of parishioners who had not "gone over" to Rehoboth across the road in search of more stirring ministrations to "sing to the praise and glory of God."

Our vicar, albeit of the broad school, had still æsthetic leanings which would have brought about certain alterations in the Havering public divine service arrangements, had he not had the fear of Lady Havering before his eyes. But this, combined with his natural indolence, still kept him faithful to the old-fashioned order of things; even to the attiring of his portly person in that de-

pressing Geneva preaching-garment, which symbolises a forty minutes' mortal weariness, however uneloquent it may be of aught besides.

Sometimes, during the infliction of these perorations, I used to sit looking up at the grand-painted windows of our five-century-old church, and speculate how their magnificent glow of colour must have affected the retina of her ladyship's eyes, to whom ecclesiologically, and indeed domestically, black and white seemed so dear. But custom had no doubt blinded her almost to consciousness of their presence; and certainly must have done so to the meaning of the legended panes, which pictured many a tale of mediæval love not chronicled in Holy Writ. Saintly bishop, too, and mitred abbot, from Saint Augustine downwards, with book and crozier or symbol of martyrdom in their slender pre-raffaelite hands,

met my lady's protestant gaze, and stirred in her no iconoclastic desires, simply, I suppose, because any link between her own form of belief and the Christianity of Old England was too utterly broken, and such things could therefore bear for her no signification healthful or harmful.

Notwithstanding, Lady Havering scented the battle of the churches from afar; and her crest rose like an ancient war-horse at the faintest calls of the tractarian enemy's advance in Havering direction. It was frightfully near certainly; for at St. Grimwold's a stout outpost had been established, and choristers, cassocks, and candles, surplices and stoles, and frequent services, and all the rest of what my lady called the paraphernalia of popery, were in full force under the supervision of the church's curate-in-charge, a hard-working, energetic young priest named Swithin Glastonbury. Strange

to say, this man had been allowed to pursue his ways comparatively unmolested, and proved himself a striking exemplar of that incontestable maxim that strong convictions can work miracles.

Slender and fragile in build, as one of Francia's saints, ascetic-looking by nature, and undoubtedly so by his ultra-regulation garb, Mr. Glastonbury had yet a straightforward, unaffected demeanour which soon won the hearts of his parishioners, to say nothing of the churchwardens, and *mirabile dictu*, that of his bishop.

"My good friends," said that dignitary, when a memorial signed by people who rarely set foot in St. Grimwold's, or any other sanctuary, was in due course presented to him containing the usual list of the new parish priest's ritual enormities, "the man's a good man, and he works; and there's plenty to do in St. Grimwold's. If he doesn't do it your

way, nor mine quite, perhaps, he does it very well, and we'll leave him alone for the present." And with this very slender hope of future hostilities, the malcontents had had to retire; and Swithin Glastonbury was left in peace, and approved himself so well that St. Grimwold's could only find one fault in him, to wit, that he remained a bachelor, a celibate perhaps he would have said, but that was an affair which it seemed to me it was an impertinence to inquire into. He might or might not have chosen to hold himself untrammelled for life, or for a term of years, believing that he was better able so to do the Master's work, or he might have elected to remain a Benedict for reasons of a more earthly nature. Hardly, however, from lack of means to keep a wife, for his family was a blue-blooded one, and he himself was far, very far, from being a starveling on an inadequate

stipend. Sometimes I wondered whether this consideration influenced by ever so little that episcopal verdict I recorded just now. But our bishop was *sui generis* of a good sort, and quite capable of a disinterested action.

It need hardly be said that Lady Havering held Swithin Glastonbury in special abhorrence. The merest glance of his long coat tails and broad brim in Havering sufficed to set the whole domestic machinery at the great house ajar, by reason of the shock they occasioned to my lady's nerves. Had she been able to rule the vicar's hearth as she did his pulpit, the curate of St. Cross's would have never set foot in Havering Vicarage; but in matters mundane, Mr. Clerestee would never be interfered with, and Swithin Glastonbury was not an unfrequent guest there; it being, however, perfectly understood that he was never to be called upon

to assist in Havering church services, though the vicar should not have a leg to stand upon. Far better, said my lady, shut up the church and have no service, than let in the thin end of the wedge in the guise of this emissary of popery, who would not even stop at hearing a confession, if you asked him to do so.

This wholesale excommunicatory sentence disturbed the young clergyman about as much as a stray fly running over his sleeve would have troubled him. To a man of æsthetic tastes, the Havering services offered no attraction, and, if they had, 'Swithin Glastonbury was essentially a man who preferred to confine himself to his own special work. This, however, did not prevent him making his way over to Havering now and again to have a chat with the vicar, to whom he was distantly related. On one of these occasions I, having called in at the vicarage,

spent some half hour in his society, and, perhaps as naturally as the needle turns to the north, our small-talk turned on a subject mutually congenial—to wit, ecclesiastical ornamentation and restoration. And from the abstract we arrived at the concrete, which centred itself on the bare, comfortless aspect his own little church presented, and how, when leisure and funds permitted, he had thought of filling in certain bare panels of the baptistery with Scriptural scenes wrought on a gilded and diapered background. This was a branch of painting craft which I had specially cultivated, and of which I was very fond, and when, some weeks after, we met again, I volunteered to attempt these panellings.

Mr. Glastonbury accepted my offer with a bright look of thanks, and while the work was in progress, would look in sometimes at the cottage to see after them. They

were not finished when Sir Morton's accident had occurred, and so it happened that the two men had first met under our roof, and conceived a mutual liking for each other—not, of course, of the violent Damon and Pythias sort. Their ways in life pointed too far asunder for that. But Sir Morton cared for Swithin Glastonbury as he cared for all honest and good things, and Swithin Glastonbury admired and liked Sir Morton, as who did not? Did I say *like*? Well, let it be; but under the spiritual, unaffected asceticism of the young priest, ran a warm vein of human affection, and if his liking for the master of Havering Court grew into such love as brother might have for brother, as sometimes I fancied it did, I say again, and what wonder?

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MIDSHIRE ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

I AM inclined to think that often, when Sir Morton did not put in an appearance on Sunday mornings in the Havering pew, he found his way down to St. Cross's. These, however, were *sub rosâ* expeditions, or, at least, reference was never made to them by him in her ladyship's presence, for the very excellent reason that he would in so doing have raised a controversial dust which was by no means to be laid again by a mere quiet word or two. Nevertheless, he did not delude himself into the belief

that my lady was not aware that he did bow down in some other temple than his own parish church, and that that temple was as often as not St. Cross's.

He further expressed his conviction to us that her ladyship's informant touching these derelictions of his was Mrs. Abigail Sharples, whom he said he invariably used to meet, taking a very long round home, after church at Havering was over, by the mill dam.

"Though what good the knowledge can do her or her mistress either, I can't imagine. Do they think we are concocting another Gunpowder Plot, I wonder?"

"You are suspected of collusion with Mr. Glastonbury in some conspiracy, depend upon it," said Lina, one day.

"Well," said Sir Morton, "the preliminary attack is to begin to-morrow. Glastonbury has just written me word."

"Upon the frescoes?" said I, ecstatically.

And Sir Morton nodded, with a smile of infinite satisfaction.

Now by these frescoes hung a tale. Once upon a time, some twelve months previous to Sir Morton's coming home, there had chanced on our hoary picturesque village a visit from some learned archæological society. A veritable visitation my lady had held it to be ; and she had made no scruple of anathematising as double-dyed children of Beelzebub every one of the mild, intelligent-looking gentlemen who had spent the precious moments of a long summer day in poking their bespectacled noses into every hole and corner of the place.

Their chief attention had, of course, been directed to the church, designated by them, on one of their itinerary papers, which had afterwards chanced to fall into Lady Havering's hands, under its invocation of SS. Mary and Peter. That the church was

so dedicated was a fact forgotten ages ago in Havering, and was now unearthed to exercise Lady Havering's soul to the verge of madness, by reason of the associations those two names called forth. Any dedication whatsoever, relic as the custom was in her eyes of mediæval superstition, would have been bad enough, but were not these two names very pillars of Popery? and therefore abominations of abominations unto her.

The antiquaries had further brought scandal upon themselves, in my lady's estimation, and upon our enlightened land, by the boundless gratification they had manifested at the sight of a little hole in the wall at the church's eastern end. Now, like that famous "primrose on the river's brink," this cavity had always been, to her ladyship, a hole and nothing more; but it grew into a hideous thing indeed when she found these archæ-

ologists called it an aumbry. It was all in vain that the vicar strove to stay the vials of her indignation by explaining its former simple use. Et tu, Brute! And sternly demanding of him whether he too were a wolf in sheep's clothing, with uplifted eyes and clasped hands, thanked the goodness and the grace for the charity sermon and the churchwarden's plate.

Sunday after Sunday, year's end to year's end, my lady had sat in her pew, blissfully unconscious of these old catholic surroundings, with which, it now dawned upon her, the ancient edifice was absolutely bristling, and the knowledge of good and evil thus thrust upon her, drove her to the verge of desperation.

All the other idolatries, however, paled beside a consciousness of the existence of certain frescoes under the whitewash of the pewed up chancel's walls. The dippings of one of the

antiquarian band into an old county history of the shire, had brought him to the certain and sure conviction that these mural decorations did exist; and having, on the day of that visit to Havering, contrived to chip away, with tenderest care, a few inches of the stucco, he proved his case beyond all doubt to the eager eyes about him, by laying bare a portion of blue and golden diaper bordering, and two or three toes of a gold-sandalled foot, apparently a woman's.

In his own inmost heart, Mr. Cleresteer had far rather they had set loose a dozen hornets' nests, and, but for very shame, would have implored them to keep their discovery locked deep in their own breasts. They, however, in the exuberance of their delight, published a pamphlet upon it, which, out of courteous consideration for the ruling power in Havering, they dedicated, "without per-

mission," to Lady Havering, and duly caused to be forwarded to her a copy of the same, wrapped about with a sumptuously hand-illuminated vellum cover.

Having been prevailed upon only by the almost tearful entreaty of Mr. Cleresteer, to refrain from sending the book back to the donors, together with a piece of her mind on the subject, she proceeded, with the extreme tips of her pale, long fingers, to make an *auto da fê* of it in the drawing-room fire; and then set about superintending in person the beplastering over again of that fair and saintly foot, observing to the unfortunate vicar, as the last vestige of it was covered away, that she trusted this would be the end of the unseemly, not to say indelicate, affair.

It was, however, not by any means the end of it. Puzzled at receiving no acknow-

ledgment of their costly offering, and burning with eagerness to bring the hidden pictures to light, the society bethought itself of appealing to Havering's absentee lord, and this time received, as soon as might be, a rejoinder that he was deeply interested at their discovery, and felt as anxious as they could be to bring about the restoration. As, however, he desired to assist in superintending the work personally, he begged that they would wait his arrival in England to commence operations. This request had, of course, been gladly complied with; and Sir Morton, a few weeks after coming to Havering, having set things in training for the work, had passingly alluded to my lady to what was about to be done. He had not known his aunt long; and her vehement denunciation of the whole business amazed him. He found it hard to conceive the existence in this nineteenth century's latter half of such

bigoted iconoclasm, but it need scarcely be said that her ladyship's furious eloquence fell on deaf ears. Yielding to a fault where only his personal interests were involved, Sir Morton stoutly refused to fall in with her crotchet, avowing himself perfectly prepared to incur all liability both for himself and for Havering generally, of that judgment which my lady, if she did not absolutely invoke it, declared would fall, must fall the day which saw those remnants of the dark ages revealed in all their nakedness.

Then Sir Morton had attempted to reason her out of her notions, but soon seeing that only the better part of valour was left him, he withdrew entirely under shelter of a silence every whit as inviolate as her ladyship maintained on the question of his engagement with Lina, never so much as letting fall a hint of the date when practical operations were to be begun. His accident which

had retarded these for a few weeks was, my lady said, a judgment upon him for his idolatrous intentions ; but directly he could get about again, the impenitent creature hurried forward the work with all the ardour of his artist soul.

“The place is a sham,” he said to me, “until it is clear of that abominable chalk stuff. A whited sepulchre that drives every good thought out of one, with the grudge one bears against the hypocritical, crop-eared scound—I mean, of course, the good people who called it religion to deface the loveliness their own little souls couldn’t reach to. No, I can’t sit in that pen of a pew, with as many brass nails in it as a state coffin, while one idea possesses me—what the frescoes are like ; and I find myself screwing up my eyes, till Lady Havering offers me her great gilt-topped smelling-bottle,—under the impression, I suppose, that I am going to have

a fit,—in the vain hope that they may attain to some sort of second sight, and pierce that ghastly white. You know the sensation, Jeannette," he added.

"And pity you accordingly," I nodded.

"*She* doesn't," he said, with a mischievous glance at his sweetheart. "She's such a downright practical little piece of propriety."

"I am not proper at all," objected Lina, —"I mean, I——"

"Thinks a church a church, you know, and all that, doesn't she? But she'll find out the error of her ways one of these days, when she has done her Fiesole and her Florence, like the good little pilgrim she's going to be, won't she, Jeannette?"

For his sake I trusted she would—for his sake, out of that higher unselfish element of my love for him, I heartily hoped she would. Yet I doubted it of my little home-bred, simple-hearted sister.

"You always ask Netta things," she said, with a coquettish pout. "Oh! I'm growing horridly jealous, I can tell you, of your 'What do you think of that, Jeannette?' and 'How about this, Jeannette?' She is quite your—your——"

"Madam Oracle? Can we have a better?" smiled he.

"She is a dear old thing, certainly," conceded her future ladyship.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PAIR OF FRESCOES.

ON a preliminary survey of the restoration-work being taken, it was found that the frescoes touched to within two feet of the ground, and that it would therefore necessitate the removal of the pews choking up the sanctuary. When this terrible sentence of destruction reached Lady Havering, she said with preternatural calmness that, in regard to the pews surrounding her own, Sir Morton's sins must be on his own head, but that no sacrilegious hand should be laid on her pew. If they desired to make a martyr of her on its account, she was ready

to suffer whatever torture their fiendish invention might devise, but that pew she would defend to the last drop of her blood. And Sir Morton, knowing her days in Havering were numbered, gave orders for it to be left untouched, and there in its isolation it stood, on the chancel's right centre, like a pound for strayed quadrupeds, or a tower of puritan strength, where Sunday after Sunday henceforth the tall plumes of her ladyship's bonnet waved defiance above its lofty line of circumvallation.

Sir Morton and his fellow-conspirators, comforted by the tacit reflection that time would level this eyesore, strove to forget it—overlook it they could not—in the contemplation of the beauties now rapidly unveiling. The subject of the fresco on the northern wall proved to be a life-sized martyrdom of St. Peter, and that on the southern side an exquisite figure of the

Magdalene. Apparently the colours had lost little or nothing of their original purity and lustre, and the martyr's golden nimbus, and the richly ornamented spikenard box in the penitent woman's hands, gleamed as brightly as they could have done when the limner put to them his final touches.

The whole work of uncovering so much beauty deeply interested me, and every day I used to spend an hour or two at a time in the church, watching its progress. Sir Morton would often stroll in too, and one afternoon, when the light scaffolding had been removed from the Mary Magdalene, which was first finished, he brought Isoline with him to see what had been done.

For some time we all three stood silently contemplating the figure, with its archaic, yet perfect grace, eloquent of those times when faith at least was able to inspire the Christian painter's brush with a breadth

of conception and a characteristic vitality which these latter days, with their "Surtout, point du zèle" watchword, rarely, if ever, see.

"'Sancta Maria Magdalena,'" said Sir Morton, bending down to decipher the quaintly lettered black and red inscription on the scroll beneath. "There was hardly need," he went on, "to add that, was there? Father or brother, whoever it was—for depend on it this is monkish work——What was that?" he cried, glancing hastily behind him.

"What was what?" said I, impatient at the interruption.

"I fancied I heard something."

"Like a groan, wasn't it?" said Lina, coming closer to Sir Morton, and stealing a fearful glance round the darkening church, for it was past five o'clock.

"Groan indeed!" said I, with my eyes

still fastened on the picture. "The wind in the belfry, you silly things. It always does make a sound like that."

"It seemed closer," meekly persisted Lina.

"Well, round the angles of the chancel here then, driving the rain. Don't you see it's begun to rain?" I said, pointing to the windows, where the drops were running down like tears. "What were you going to say, Sir Morton?"

"Why, that this is monkish work, and of the best kind, too. See how every line tells the tale, and how the artist's hand must have obeyed what his mind's eye saw."

Truly it must have been so. Never a hint was there of pure, serene Madonna Mary, but a prevailing sense of mournful lassitude and of utter weariness under the load of sin cast aside at last, mingled with an indescribable repose that whispered of the

new-born hope uprisen in the dark soul tenanting that fair, sin-stained body, where low-bending it knelt, with the waves of glorious hair half concealing the sad, beautiful face, and tangling down about the slender hands that clasped to her breast the precious casket.

“One fancies one sees the sour-faced grandees looking on with their greedy eyes, and asking why this treasure of hers had not been sold, and its value given to the poor. It isn’t a hundred years ago,” continued Sir Morton, with a faint twinkle in his eyes, “that I was fenced with a similar question touching these same pictures here.”

“By Lady Havering, I suppose?”

“By Lady Havering, yes.”

“And you,” asked Lina, “what answer did you make her, Morton?”

“None, carissima, beyond telling her to

turn and read for herself the Master's answer."

"And my lady——"

"My lady is marble to receive ; and will remain, I suppose, a strenuous supporter to the end of her own private judgment. But why should we plague ourselves about my aunt and her crotchets? How that wind does howl, to be sure! Let's go. Come, Jeannette."

"Presently."

"Through the rain? Umbrellaless? We've only got one, you know."

Of course I did. They never would have two.

"I don't want one. It's only a shower, and will be over before I'm ready to come away. I haven't half done looking yet."

"If she won't she won't, and there's an end on't. Come, heart's delight," he said, tucking Lina's arm under his, "let's go,

then, and leave her to her own crooked ways and the bogies."

And so he hurried her off, halting in the porch to smother her about with her wraps, as though a hundred miles' journey lay before them, instead of barely that number of yards.

I watch them splashing on under that one and indivisible umbrella, over the streaming pavement, through the crowding old grave-stones, and out by the lych-gate, all love, and life, and trust—looking after them as I have done so many and many a time, with that desolate, wistful, wondering why the lot of some is so sweet, and why—but hush! that is forbidden ground, speculations like these would drift me whither I dare not so much as look; and, with a consolation only lonely lovelessness can know, I turn to forget the woman in the artist. And yet, fool that I am, when in me at least the one is but the

handmaiden of the other ! When would bitter experience bring home to me that in these things dwelt at once the antidote and the bane ? That they were the very food of the life of that my whole mental strength and common sense were striving to crush ! Why, I could not look upon a fair wayside flower, a silver cloudlet, I could not so much as hear a strain of music, the trill of a bird, the busy hum and stir of common life around me, but in some vague, mysterious way they brought Sir Morton Havering to my mind ; links as they were in that golden chain, binding inseparably all pure and lovely and lovesome things in God's created world.

And yet my mind must grow callous, and turned inward, to look only along that dull, hard road whose goal is duty—honour ! Oh ! me, for the bitter cold, and the barren, lightless way it led. If the angels could have whispered in my dull, sad ears that, afar off,

one pallid hope-star pierced its leaden clouds,
I should not have believed them. I, lonely,
desolate, perishing for joys of which it was
a crime even to dream !

How strange it seemed to me always, that
calm content of Isoline's—those languorous
gentle smiles with which she greeted his
countless endearing words, and his lover-
like little cares of her ! Just as a queen
might accept some humble liegeman's offer-
ing of costly gems or flowers. Sweet I
knew indeed they were to her ; but, to me,
a lifetime of lower happiness would have
been worthless beside one murmur of them.

And I must bear the burden of all this
alone, with the torture ten thousand times
sharper, that I could not fly from his pres-
ence. I was like some masker bearing a
brave face, with a gaping wound tearing at
the life of him under his motley wear.

Above all, I must keep the secret from her who had hitherto shared my every thought. How long—how long must I drag on so? Through interminable years, or might it be that soon death would bring me its merciful message, or—might I not go to death and find peace?"

I shivered at the horrid, tempting fancy ere it had scarce found birth, and wondered whether my mind was indeed growing dazed now, as often I thought it had seemed to be; for, standing there in my desolation, my whirling brain could evolve no order in the surging chaos of thoughts and memories that overwhelmed me.

In mute, bewildering misery, I stood staring round me, straining my eyeballs like some caged creature to find a loophole of escape from myself; listening if perchance some pitying voice should call me to

take comfort ; but there was no sound save the dull drip, drip of the rain outside, and the low moaning of the wind.

The rigid ruling of that place allowed no gleaming cross nor starry flower within its sanctuary. No holy symbol of things as yet unseen was there to draw my fainting soul out of itself, and bid it look upward and onward. I could see nothing to right and left of me, as far as my eye could reach, but those rectangular pew lines. Turning from their maddening recurrence bodily, as mentally I turned from the dun monotony of the days of my life to come, I cast my eyes upward in quest of relief ; but what ray of it was to be found in that congeries of mural tablets with their sullen blacks and whites looming through the twilight shadows, suggestive only of blank, colourless death ? What comfort could those cold stones, with their teapot-like urns, inverted

torches, and death's heads—that seemed to grin derisively with their chapless jaws at the “resurgam” inscribed beneath—give to me? There was a time, thought I, in my vague, dreamy speculativeness, when hunted and grief-stricken creatures fled for soul or body's refuge to some fair church as to God's own ark upon the world's tempest-tossed flood, but this bare, sheer hulk of a sanctuary, with its travesty of art! surely here was no consolation!

Had its old protective, sheltering virtue gone out of it, I wondered, at that same time when men ceased to take pride in clothing it with external beauty, and their hands, inspired no longer, worked like clumsy machines, and turned out into it tons of coarse-hewn marble, and piles of wooden clouds, and set the lion and unicorn up on high? Ah me! how ruthlessly, when they strove to drag up the tares of superstition,

those old reformers tore away the wheat of Christian art's reverential spirit!—that spirit which illumined the day-dreams of the Tuscan shepherd-boy, and brought Angelico to paint upon his knees.

Ichabod! All its glory had departed! faded out like the secret of that mystery of colour up in the great five-century old east window which, somehow, puritan vandalism had passed over. Ay, there indeed. How was it? By what miracle had the hands of the spoilers spared this grand testimony of divine suffering and of boundless love. Here no pompous precepts enforced this or that clause of an elaborate faith formula. No words there at all, only the silent, pictured eloquence of the Divine Master's death! The record of doing, and of suffering, and of broken hearts that lived on through their span, though their Light was gone. With eyes which moistened grate-

fully as they gazed, I stood drinking in the old, old story as though now only, for the first time, I had sounded all its real significance and depth, until my tear-blurred vision could distinguish only one blending of sweet, soft colour, and I slowly turned away, only to come once again face to face with the frescoed Magdalene.

If the figure had seemed to me beautiful at first, now, in the light of the calmer, better thoughts which somehow had come to me, its loveliness thrilled through to my heart's core. Here was a woman, a frail sinful woman—nay, I shrank from no comparisons, her committed sin was not the one which I in thought had been guilty of. That which tempted me, had it come to be consummated, would have been shrugged at and smiled about by the world as quite a venial sort of one. It might have called me “tricky, vain, ambitious, selfish,” what

not, had I striven to—what? What had been the hideous flash of temptation which had half blinded me with its lurid glare? Must pen set it down in this record, which has sworn to no disguising?—To try and supplant Lina in her lover's affections!

There had been moments when it seemed to me that if—— No, there are thoughts pen and paper dare not perpetuate; there are tortures living hearts cannot endure; and the evil which had lain stealthily germinating within me perished a double death in the presence of that penitent woman.

Like her, I seemed to stand shriven now. The past seemed blotted out, and free, trusting to endure, as strength might be mine to the end, be the years many or few, I sank down, his name upon my lips, in an agony of sobbing, with my head against the frescoed stone.

CHAPTER XIX.

“WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK.”

“**I**DOLATRESS !”

I started to my knees, and, hurriedly brushing away the blinding tears, saw the tall, gaunt figure of Lady Havering standing over me, looking, with her cadaverous face and glittering eyes, like another witch of Endor.

“Get up !” she continued, roughly dragging me with a hard, bony grip to my feet ; but her assistance was superfluous. “Get up, if these walls are not to fall in judgment upon us. This surpasses even my worst fears. And so soon, too ! The idol barely ex-

posed, and you on your knees before it. Answer me, Jeannette Latour. What do you do here, praying to that painted abomination? Is it not enough that the brazen harlot flaunts it at the very door of my pure and peaceful protestant pew here, but you must fall down and worship? Oh, for shame! for shame!"

The faint involuntary smile that escaped me added fuel to the flame of her ire.

"Oh! I know you!" she went on. "Smile as long as you please, and as much, but don't flatter yourself you're going to get in the thin end of your popish trumpery here in Havering. When I think of the goings on at St. Grimwold's—— Oh! do you fancy I don't know all your plottings, too, with that poor, misguided young—wolf in sheep's clothing, Swithin Glastonbury?"

"Madam!"

"Ho! yes, madam, madam! Miss Inno-

cence!—but you don't think I'm quite blind, do you? You don't think I'm ignorant that he's hand in glove with you?—do you deny it? Do you dare to deny your friendship with him? Do you?"

"Indeed, no. Mr. Glastonbury is our friend——"

"Our friend!" mocked she, with a low laugh. "Yours and Miss Isoline's, eh? and——"

"And, above all, your nephew's."

"Thanks to you," she said, biting her pale lips. "If Sir Morton Havering had been under my roof all the while he has been here, as he ought, he would never have known him."

"I think that doesn't follow," ventured I, boldly.

"Is it of any consequence to me what you think? Neither will your jesuitical evasions serve you. The question is this:

that if I so much as hear a whisper of your attempting to tamper with the precious souls in this place——”

“Really, Lady Havering,” protested I, “I have no intentions upon them.”

“No, no! none!” she cried, hysterically. “No more than you had upon my nephew, Sir Morton Havering, when you inveigled him——”

“Lady Havering,” interrupted I, “these are strange words.”

“Truer than strange,” retorted she, her lips quivering uncontrollably.—“Truer than strange, young woman. No, no, I am not a fool. A man like my nephew to be hoodwinked and flattered out of his senses by a pretty face, and trapped into a marriage with such as——Oh! I’m sure,” she added, with a sneer, “I really beg your pardon, Miss Latour—I forgot. It is not you, though, is it?”

She paused for breath, and into her eyes, transfixing mine with their sharp, steely intelligence, flashed a mysteriously cunning, speculative light.

"It is your sister Isoline. Are you quite sure it is?"

"Sure, do you mean," returned I, bewildered by her strange query, "that my sister is the affianced wife of Sir Morton Haverling?"

She nodded, still with her eyes on mine.
"Ay."

"Certainly I am," continued I, still wondering whether I had rightly apprehended her words.

"Certainly are you!" she echoed, sneeringly. "And the wedding-day—that is, of course, equally sure. When is it to be, pray? Sir Morton has not deigned to inform me."

"Perhaps you have not asked him."

"Perhaps not. When is it to be?"

"Some day early in December."

"And this," she said, making a rapid calculation on her claw-like fingers, "is the end of October. You are very glad, of course, Miss Latour?"

"Why should I not be?"

"Meeting question with question is no answer," she said, with an impatient gesture.

"I asked you if you were glad."

"I am content——"

"That she has done so well for herself. Yes, it was clever of her. She may well be content, I imagine, to be the wife of my nephew."

"To be the wife of Sir Morton Havering, yes."

"An enviable position, Miss Latour. You do not answer. Don't you think it is?" she persisted.

"I think my sister cannot fail to be happy."

"No. Havering is a good prize in the matrimonial market."

"I was thinking," said I, fairly roused, "of the prize of the heart she has won."

"Oh! were you so? You always did give me an impression of being rather a sentimental young person. But if you valued him so highly," she continued, after a pause, "you should have secured him for yourself. How came you to let him slip through those clever fingers of yours?" she demanded, with a coarse familiarity that sounded strangely from her haughty lips. "Do you know," she went on, when she found that a stare of astonishment was my sole reply, "that at first I understood you were the favoured one. You blush—was there any foundation for the rumour?"

"Indeed there was not," said I, wondering what devil was urging on this woman to forget her dignity, and to torture me.

"Who dared, Lady Havering, to bring that lying tittle-tattle to your ears—yours?"

It was her turn to flush slightly.

"How," I went on, "could you stoop to listen——"

"Really, my good Miss Latour," interrupted she, with a wretched attempt at indifference, "listen is quite too strong a term. The whole affair, I assure you, is one so utterly uninteresting to me that whatever I might have chanced to hear, escaped any second thought on my part. If my nephew—I would say Sir Morton Havering—thinks proper to make a *mésalliance*, in what possible manner can it concern me?"

I bowed.

"Simply," she went on, "I wash my hands of him. This world and its poor pomps and vanities may be soul snares to the unregenerate, to us—to me they are

less than nothing. If Sir Morton married a pauper to-morrow, in what way do you suppose it could mar my interior joy?" She paused, and it was so obvious that some comment was expected of me that I said I "hoped it would not." "No," she went on, in tones of beatific sweetness, "I should simply ignore the existence of that person, as I should trample the worm under my foot. Socially—but you look excited, Miss Latour, you appeared so, I fancied, when I entered, a minute or two ago, for shelter. Something probably has put you out. Is it so? Ah, ah! no answer. Then I can only wish you a new heart and a more chastened spirit, unperturbed by trifling crosses. Little trials——"

"We all have them, I suppose, Lady Havering, little and great, if we only live long enough," said I, bluntly, looking towards the porch to see if the rain had

ceased, but it still pattered mercilessly ;
“and our evil tempers too.”

“Let us lay them,” ejaculated her ladyship, lifting her eyes to the rampant lion and unicorn on the key-stone of the chancel arch, “at the foot of the throne, and forsake idols. I trust I have made myself clear to you, Miss Latour ? I should feel so greatly to blame, if I had failed after all.”

“In what ?” I asked, putting my hand to my aching head.

“In explaining that, in the event of Sir Morton connecting himself with your family, I simply wash my hands of him. Do I make myself clear ?”

“You have done so, madam, for this long time past,” said I, wearily.

“Ah ! I am glad—so gratified to think we have met. Such a providential meeting ! I have so long desired to put to you as delicately as possible, beyond all manner

of question, that whether the object of Sir Morton's choice—*choice!*—how absurd, poor fellow!—be yourself, as I once was led to infer."

"Heaven knows how——"

"Pray remember where you are, Miss Latour," frowned my lady. "As I once was led to infer, or your sister, as you now affirm it to be——"

"As it is."

"Joan or Jill," she replied, with an impatient but lofty wave of her hand, "is, must be, less than immaterial to me, since I cannot be called upon to recognize any such connexion. Good evening, Miss Latour; the rain appears to have abated. A passing shower only," she added, with plaintive condescension as she glided away.

Such a privileged person as her ladyship could of course pronounce a steady down-pour of more than an hour's duration to be

a passing shower if she pleased ; but I felt morally sure that, let it have begun when it might, the first drops of it had seen her enter the church, and that Lina had been justified of her shrinking terrors. Had my lady, I wondered, been sunken into the deeps of her own pew, or had she screened herself from our observation amid the monumental and pillared labyrinth of the chancel approaches? That she had overheard what had passed between us three, I had no doubt at all ; and though nothing very startling had occurred in our desultory chat, still she had met with the proverbial doom of listeners, and heard nothing particularly good of herself.

But things might have been worse. Since she had had something to say after all, I was glad it had been said not to Lina, but to me ; who had some acquaintance with the angles of her mind, and as I locked up the

great church door, and carried the key to the sexton's cottage, I felt a rueful satisfaction that we had known now all that we were ever likely to know of Lady Havering.

CHAPTER XX.

A GAVOTTE OF BOCCHERINI'S.

SWITHIN GLASTONBURY was standing under the little latticed cottage porch, just putting up his dripping umbrella again, for the rain had begun faster than ever.

"Out this wet afternoon, Miss Latour?" he said, lifting his broad-brimmed hat, and making way for me to enter the house.

"Thanks, Mr. Glastonbury," I replied, holding up the key, as I handed it in. "I only came to leave this. I must hurry home."

"You have no umbrella?"

"No," said I, smiling at the little reminiscence. "We had only one between us three, and those two selfish creatures——"

"Sir Morton and your sister?"

"Yes; carried that off an hour ago."

"And you've been alone in there all this time?" he asked, pointing towards the church, looming blackly now against the leaden sky.

"I've been looking at the frescoes."

"Ah!" he said, in a vexed tone. "Just what I walked over to do. But I couldn't leave St. Grimwold's very early, and when I did get away, I—something detained me on the road. But you'll be wet through in two seconds. May I see you home?"

"If you'll come in when we get there, and wait till this deluge is over. Sir Morton is there."

"You hold out sore temptations," he said. "But there's evensong at seven,

you know, and I'm single-handed just now."

"Don't let me keep you then."

"Oh! I've time enough. I can take the short cut through the wood."

"Not at this time of night, Mr. Glastonbury."

"Why not?" he said. "The ghosts won't hurt me."

"N—no; but it will be ankle-deep in mud."

"Oh! my landlady always has my slippers toasting in the fender for me. She's very good. One's own wi—mother, you know, couldn't coddle one more."

"That's very nice and right of her," said I.

"Oh! very nice," rather drearily assented he. "By the way, Miss Latour," he added, more briskly, "this umbrella of mine is favoured. You're not the first lady it has had the honour of sheltering this afternoon."

"Indeed."

"I met Miss Havering just by the gate of St. Grimwold's wood."

"Coming out of it?"

"I imagine so. And that's what detained me, for it had just begun to rain, and so I walked round with her to the lodge gates, where she borrowed an umbrella. She wouldn't have me come farther."

"You were bold to have ventured so far," laughed I.

"Was I?" he asked, with that density of perception so characteristic of the superior sex.

"Well, it was into the enemy's camp rather."

"Oh! I never thought of that. The poor child was getting wet through, don't you see. What could I do?" he added, apologetically. "I couldn't——"

"Pass by on the other side, for all you

were the proud priest my lady calls you, Mr. Glastonbury."

"But what could she be wanting in that place? *Qu'allait-elle faire dans cette galère?* Can you imagine?" he said, with a puzzled look.

"It's rather a favourite haunt of hers."

"Odd taste, isn't it?" shivered he.

"Well, perhaps I should say it is, if I hadn't such a fancy for the place myself. It may be an aberration of intellect——"

"No," he interrupted, "not on your part, when your brush exorcises such lovely 'bits' out of it. But Miss Havering—she—do you think she—she doesn't seem bright to me, you know."

"She's very dull, Mr. Glastonbury. Sometimes I fancy it would take only a slight thing to drive her to idiocy."

"She seems sensible enough, though, to a kind word."

"Perhaps. When she gets it."

"You don't think Lady Havering is harsh with her?"

"I'm sure she is. I—— Mind that puddle!" I cried, glancing up at the face looking thoughtfully into the murky air, oblivious of the perils of the way. He started aside.

"She's very fond of you," he said.

"Lady Havering?" I asked, wondering whether my companion's intellect had also suddenly deteriorated.

"Ursula Havering. Do you know," he went on, "she told me this afternoon you were her only friend. An angel—that's what she called you."

"You mustn't believe her, Mr. Glastonbury."

"But I do."

"Then it is nonsense. How can I be-

friend her, who dare hardly speak a dozen words to her?"

"They can be kind ones, Miss Latour, as I know they have been."

"Words are nothing."

"Indeed they are very much," he said.

"They have saved many a miserable creature from utter despair. Just as to look at some beautiful thing will often cheer back hearts to resignation and to God."

"That is your creed, Mr. Glastonbury?"

"As it is yours, Miss Latour. Don't let the strife of tongues scare you out of it."

"Will you not come in?"

He cast a wistful glance at the dancing firelight on the window-panes, then he took out his watch, and slowly shook his head. "Not to-night," and so he turned to face his cold, wet way back to St. Grimwold's.

"Where's your cavalier?" asked Lina, as

I entered the warm, cosy room, and sank down, strangely weary on the sofa.

"Gone home."

"Wouldn't he come in?"

"Hadn't time."

"He had enough to stand talking full five minutes under the pouring rain at the gate," she said. "We could see you, my dear. What was it about?"

"Oh, I don't know," I said, with a touch of impatience.

"Ah!" said Lina. "Well, from a prosaic point of view, I'm glad you're safe indoors. Reuben's gone down after you with a cloak and umbrella. How pale you are, Jeannette, and your poor, white cheeks all wet too, like tears! But——"

"The rain beat in our faces," said I, wiping away the moisture.

"That's all?" she said, kneeling in front of the fire, and, leaning her arm on my

knee, she looked anxiously up in my face.

“Of course it’s all. Where’s Sir Morton?”

“Writing a letter—of the utmost importance—in the other room,” she said, dragging off my wet boots and bonnet, and making me generally presentable without the trouble of stirring. “He’s going to stop and have tea, isn’t he, Scampy? and shock the proprieties by staying all the evening, eh, Scampy? and he’s sending my lady a note up to explain, and we’re going to have a concert. Isn’t it jolly? Oh! If only Mr. Glastonbury could have stayed, it would have been perfect, wouldn’t it, Scampy—Scampy?” And, to judge from the spirited execution of the *pas de deux* that ensued between the dog and herself, things were as near perfection without any addition whatsoever.

It is an almost unknown proceeding for Sir Morton to spend an evening with us.

The clockwork precision of domestic rule at Havering Court demands his punctual appearance there to dinner on the stroke of seven, and by a sort of unspoken, but thorough understanding, he never appears again at Cliffe Cottage until next day.

What has led to the waiving of this custom on this particular evening, I cannot say. I do not think of inquiring. I only know it seems to me like the old days again to see Sir Morton sitting there in the lamplight, with the *Saturday Review* across his knee, and his gaze on Lina, where she sits playing a gavotte of Boccherini's, a great favourite of Sir Morton's, with its quaint rhythmical sweetness. If things were quite en règle, her instrument should be a spider-legged, twanging harpsichord, instead of our sober, rich-toned Broadwood, for Lina wears over her close-fitting dress of some soft dark brocaded stuff, a wonderful old-world bob-

bin-net cape, edged round with some costly lace she lately rummaged into the light of day, from a box of finery which had belonged to our great-grandmother. This is gathered about her graceful shoulders, and close to her neck, whence depends from a broad band of black velvet, a closed locket of old red gold set with pearls, enshrining an interwoven lock of our father's dark hair and a sunny tress of our mother's. She has further elected to cover her shapely head with a mob-crowned cap, edged with a bordering of aforesaid ancestral lace, whence the stray rings of hair and the tips of her tiny ears peep coyly forth.

The modest coquetry of this Pamela Vanessa garb always suits Madam Isoline marvellously well. Its sterling stuff and absence of superfluity seem the very outward expression of her bright, soft womanliness. One ornament besides she does

wear, as day and night she has worn it now since he placed it on her finger—the magnificent diamond ring that seals their plighted troth. How it flashes and sparkles in the lamplight, as her white hands glide over the keys, bright as the light of hope and happiness in her clear eyes, pure as the warm flush on her cheeks, dazzling as the smile playing about the curves of her sweet mouth. Isoline is absolutely radiant to-night. I have never seen her look so beautiful.

Does Sir Morton think so too? I ask myself, as, with the final chords of her lilt-ing, cheery music, he rises, and, leaning with one arm on the mantelshelf, stretches out the other towards her, and drawing her to his side gazes down with passionate admiration on her upturned face. Was ever pair more nobly matched? Why, if my lady could see them now, even she——

Then a cold shiver seizes me, such as old nurses say shudders through one, when feet are treading one's grave, and the fair reality fades in that day's retrospect. Little do those two lovers dream, or care, for that matter, of the way my thoughts go wandering, while they turn over the music-books.

Of one thing I am determined, and that is that no word of my interview with Lady Havering shall be told either to Lina or to Sir Morton. And then I strive to put the disagreeable remembrance from me, but it haunts me with hideous persistence. Lady Havering's demeanour had been so strange, so inconsistent. At the very moment she was declaring her nephew's marriage to be a matter of complete indifference to her, it was evident, by the latent gleam in her eyes, and the uncontrollable agitation of her every feature, that her words and her thoughts were very far from according, and

that disappointment and jealousy rankled bitterly in her, even to the effacement of her dominant bigotry. For I did not forget how suddenly she had passed from her first burst of righteous indignation at what she had been pleased to call my idolatrous proclivities, to other more mundane grievances, and never so much as reverted to her original charge of my spiritual enormities, which surely, under other conditions, would have made a fruitful theme indeed.

Still once more I asked myself why I needed to waste so much consideration on her ladyship? What could her displeasure be to us? One would have wished it to have been otherwise, of course; but why should I make crumpled rose-leaves for these two by so much as the faintest allusion to the interview? And then there was that selfish motive in my resolution, inasmuch as I should have found it hard to

render up details without betraying that which it behoved my womanhood, and, in a sense, their happiness and peace, to keep thrice hidden? Merely to tell them that Lady Havering and I had met, and exchanged a passing word or two, would not have sufficed at all with these two clever people. At any rate, it would not have passed muster with Lina, who would have pushed me home with all sorts of questions, and to tell the plain, unvarnished situation of that scene, was to give up the key to that which I had hitherto managed to keep hidden as I would have kept a wild animal caged ; to part with the secret I would have paid my life to keep.

Mystery and secrecy were hateful as poison to me ; but here, I felt, was a case in which no good turn was to be served by giving tongue to it, and infinite harm avoided by silence.

But supposing Lady Havering should think proper herself to allude to our meeting, to Sir Morton? Well, she was hardly likely to relate it very circumstantially. And, even if she did, thank heaven she did not know my heart, and therefore her colouring of the tale was not likely to be the true one, though indeed I dreaded what construction she had put upon those tear-swollen eyelids. If she should hint at my disordered looks to Sir Morton, who had left me apparently calm, and with even a smile upon my face!

Well, well! It was not foolishly flattering unction to lay to my soul that my lady would be as reticent as I myself determined on being.

CHAPTER XXI.

“THE DAY IS DARK AND DREARY.”

WHEN the days passed, and Sir Morton made no reference to the dreaded subject, my mind grew easier. The memory of my disagreeable encounter gradually faded to insignificance. I did not, however, lose it altogether, for now and again a dim suspicion crossed me that Lady Havering had hinted to him of our meeting in the church, since at odd moments, when I chanced to look up suddenly, I would find his eyes fixed on my face with a puzzled, cogitative look, mingled with something in them akin

to pity, as if he might be striving to read my inmost thoughts; and it was not long before he asked me point-blank if anything was amiss with me.

"What should be, Sir Morton?" proudly returned I.

"You've grown so pale and thin lately," he replied. "Hasn't she, Lina?"

"Letting concealment," saucily said she, taking my face in her two hands and kissing it, "like a worm in the bud, and——"

"Don't, child!" said I, shaking myself free with a laugh.

"And all that sort of thing," she rattled on. "Come, confess now, Netta; who is the favoured object? It isn't Squire Thornfield—Squoire Tharnfield, as Reuben calls him?"

"Hold your tongue."

"No poor man, that I know; and it isn't——"

"Do be quiet."

"Netta, I never told you we met Mr. Glastonbury trudging along Bogslush Lane yesterday, when we were out. Did he by any chance look in here—to see how St. Michael gets on, you know?"

"Just for a minute. Yes."

"Ah! you never said," she cried, her eyes dancing with glee.

"I forgot."

"Oh! I see. Somehow," she went on, "there's a look of our reverend friend about the face of this handsome saint here. If one could only throw about him this short white mantle and arm him cap-à-pie in this shining coat of mail, I declare it wouldn't be half a bad likeness."

"I am glad you think so," said I. "Mr. Glastonbury's features formed the groundwork of my conception."

"Which we can only admit," said Lina,

snatching Sir Morton's paper from his hands and pretending to read. "Um—um—um— 'has been most conscientiously embodied by the pencil of the fair artist. If only'—um—um—where was I?—'if only——' "

"Don't be so ridiculous."

"Well, if it isn't Squire Thornfield——"

"Lina, do be quiet."

"Is it—is it——"

"Sir Morton!" I cried, throwing down my brushes in a confusion of real vexation at her banter, "do make haste, if you're going, and take her out. She does hinder so horribly!"

And I lifted my eyes with an effort to meet, with a responsive smile, the one I had no doubt had risen to his lips; but he was not smiling, on the contrary, he was looking at Lina, an expression of grave reproach in his eyes. She flushed, and went out with a little silent toss of her head.

"Some things," he said, as he closed the door on her and returned to his seat, "are beyond a jest. I don't know how it is, but she has nearly contrived to vex me—for the first time in my life," and he bit his lip and frowned.

"Let it be the last, then," I said. "She meant no harm, poor child; she only said——"

"She should have said nothing at all."

"Now—you're not really angry with her."

"No, no, of course not," but his brow was only clearing very gradually—"oh, no; but—well—somehow—things of this sort are so sacred. I always do hate that touch-and-go manner, those nods and becks, and stupid inuendoes people are so fond of throwing at what they call *affaires du cœur*. Do they know what it really is, I wonder?"

he added sotto voce to himself, as he went out after his sweetheart.

Why would the simplest expression of this man's thoughts be always the very echo of mine, till my full heart yearned towards him with an infinite longing? Who else, man or woman, of all the people I had ever known, would have granted me the distinction I felt he had made for me, when I admitted by implication the admiration and esteem I had for Swithin Glastonbury? No doubt he was so able to do this because of his own appreciation of his friend's character. I think he saw, as I did, that, fragile, fallible, mortal man as Swithin Glastonbury might be, there yet shone through every act and word of him all that purity and singleness of purpose, and silent, intent enthusiasm which one conceives of these messengers from heaven. And I know that Sir

Morton entered into the spirit which had prompted me to catch the expression of the young priest's face, and perpetuate it on the panellings of the "Mystical Four" I was engaged upon.

And if you could so utterly grasp the motive power, fathom the deepest well-springs of my heart, Sir Morton Havering, I think I was able to do the same by you—at least, as no other woman, not your love herself, could do; but that you did not know, nor how many a time, when the noble sensitiveness of your nature was ruffled, you hardly knew why, and certainly never complained, I saw and understood. Selfish, earth-tainted, my love for you might have been, but I know through its grosser elements, permeated an unsullied seeking for your happiness alone, let the cost be what it might to me.

Often then in my pride I used to think

that, if the sacrifice of my soul's metempsychosis into Lina's beautiful form could have been accomplished, I would have gladly yielded up my own identity and faded into nothingness, could it have brought more happiness and fuller satisfaction into his life. Quiet and intelligent and full of tender, clinging affection as Isoline was, mentally even, as women are by comparison with men, not greatly his inferior, could she, I used to ask myself, be all-in-all to him? Would there ever come a day when he would perceive something lacking in her—something in his being that reflected no answering light—or shadow in hers? Was she, in brief, beyond all doubt really calculated to make him happy?

Well, he thought so; and it was the height of absurdity to question the standard a man forms of his own ideas of happiness, and say: "It's all very well for you to love

this woman, but that's the one you ought to have loved, if you knew what was really good for you!" That was certainly the *reductio ad absurdum* of such speculations as mine, and with a smile and a sigh I put them from me—till they came back again.

Turning to the medal's reverse, I had no fears for Lina's happiness with him. How could I? Was it not enough to reflect that she would live in the light of his presence, that her eyes would always be gladdened when they rested on him, as flowers rejoice in the blessed sun? That she loved him to the uttermost depths of her heart, I knew indeed. How low those deeps lay I understood less entirely; and possibly, with innate human selfishness, was troubled to fathom less carefully than I was to sound the deeps of my own being. Only that her love, once given, would never know change, I was convinced. Beautiful, sought after, she was no butterfly,

and, if it had just now been her pleasure to call up the vision of an unsuccessful wooer of mine, I could, had I chosen, have met her with a good half dozen disconsolates to whom she had turned a deaf ear, but who could certainly plead no defence that she had lured them on, to cast them off. No, I knew she was needle true.

So it was I used to sum up my estimate of Lina's character; as we are so fond of putting together, puzzlewise, the salient visible points of our fellow-creatures' mental attributes, knowing all the while less of their inner being than even we know of our own, and only less astonished at finding our calculations of them defective now and then, than we are at the contradictions and inconsistencies of ourselves. Had some all-potent fiend hissed in my ear that, before the dying leaves lay all fallen, there should be estrangement between these lovers, I

should have turned and given it the lie.

That little cloud, certainly not so big as a man's hand, which had risen between them as Lina left the room, has clearly all vanished to its own place as they swing the garden-gate after them, blowing me a kiss from their finger tips. Scamp is barking and whirling in mad career round them; he has heard them talk of St. Grimwold's, and is perfectly aware that he has a walk before him almost as long as heart and legs of him can desire. It is a good three miles to St. Grimwold's; that length doubled, and his incursions into rabbit-burrows and rat-holes by the way superadded, Scamp, at a rough calculation, will have done his good eight miles by the time he is home again.

I look after the trio with a sigh. I think I should be a monster in human form if I were not envious of this zenith of their great content. Little enough matter to

them that Dame Nature's autumn is come, and that the scanty foliage still clinging to the trees is grown sodden and brown. For them the clouds that are slowly and sullenly rolling in the pallid, watery blue, make a firmament clear and azure as an Italian sky. The doleful twitter of the birds sounds in their ears a cheery greeting, and in the rose-colour of their own bliss, the hips and haws of the ragged hedgerows are beautiful as the whitethorn's fairest young shoots.

Quite early this morning I noticed the portents of wet in the lowering sky, and, with a practical wisdom, endeavoured to persuade Lina from accompanying Sir Morton to St. Grimwold's, whither some business appointment summoned him for mid-day. In a feeble way, Sir Morton seconded my argument, and of course Lina treated all we had to say with the magnificent scorn we deserved, and now they are gone.

"Take care of yourselves," I call after them. Naturally, my disposition is not a kill-joy one; and yet I never do see a merry setting-out, but I think of the old sage's dismal axiom of the "joyful mornynge that makyth a sad evenynge." Yet why it should have flashed across me then so forcibly, as I seated myself for a long painting spell, I cannot tell, seeing that rarely a day ever passed on which the two did not set out on some ramble or other.

And so they are gone. "Merry as grigs," as Dolly observes, looking after them; "don't it make ye feel a bit lone like, Miss Netta dear, to see 'em?"

I laugh and shake my head, pointing to my painting paraphernalia.

"Ah! well, they're rare and pretty, there's no denying. But if I was queen of England, every Jill should have her Jack."

Then she leaves me, and I fall to work

in good earnest. Imperceptibly the hours wear on, carrying with them the last faint and sickly sunshine, until the light grows so dull that I have to lay down my pencil and go to the window to draw up the blind.

For the first time I see that it is raining fast. A noiseless, penetrating, persistent drizzle. How long, I wonder, has it been falling? Some time, to judge by the condition of the paths, and my thoughts fly to Lina and Sir Morton; but I soon console myself with the reflection that they must have been safe at St. Grimwold's two hours ago, and will stay to luncheon at the friend's house where they are gone. And as to coming home again, there are plenty of conveyances at St. Grimwold's, besides——

The click of the gate interrupted my cogitations, and then I caught sight of Lina, alone! her pretty morning dress and dainty hat-feathers all bedraggled and

soaked through and through, while Scamp, mud-plastered from his drooping ears to his depressed tail, skulked at her heels, a sore contrast to the exuberant creature of the morning.

But no Sir Morton !

“ Oh, you drowned rat ! ” was Mrs. Tug-nutt’s greeting, as she opened the door, and pouncing upon Scamp, she seized him by the scruff of his neck for the purpose of submitting him to the tubbing similia similibus curantur treatment which was his inevitable doom whenever he got himself into difficulties of the sort. “ And don’t you stand like that in your wet things—wet to the bone, poor dear, I declare she is, Miss Netta. Take her up this moment and get her boots off, do.”

“ Yes, yes. Come,” I said.

Murmuring some indistinct assent she stepped past me, and glided up the stairs

with a stiff, mechanical motion, like a somnambulist, or a person under mesmeric influence; and so, looking to neither right nor left of her, passed on into her own room, and sank down on a chair, silently and passively allowing me to drag and peel off her wet things, and making barely an effort to help me.

"You're very tired, dear," I said, pushing back the dank curls from her colourless face, and startled by the dark shadows encircling the eyes that were fixed on me with a strange, wistful, half tender, half shrinking expression.

"Very tired?" she said. "Yes, I suppose I am. Oh, yes, very tired."

And then, one by one, a few big tears rolled down her cheeks. I wiped them away—for she made no effort to do so herself—and kissed her.

"Don't!" she cried, starting to her feet,

and jerking her face from me with a sudden, almost fierce energy, "I can't bear that! Not yet. Go away."

I drew back in amazement. Could this really be my gentle, sweet-tempered Lina?

"Go away," she pleaded, passionately.

"But——"

"Ah! why do you make such a fuss?" she went on, in tones sunken now to fretfulness, "about a drop or two of rain—a drop or two of rain. Did nobody," demanded she, with an hysterical laugh, "ever get a wetting before that you keep staring at me like that? I'll be down, I tell you, in a few seconds. Can't you leave me to myself?"

Then I left her; and, true to her word, in a very little while she came down, looking as neat and trim as ever, with her bright hair, crisp with the rain, clustering in tiny rings over her forehead, but upon her face was still that dazed, wearied look.

She took in silence the cup of hot tea I placed beside her, and made an effort to eat, but pushed the plate aside directly after.

"You had lunch at St. Grimwold's?" I said.

"No," she replied, reaching behind her for her work-basket, and, taking from it her thimble, she put it on, and began to stitch at some piece of muslin stuff.

"How was that?"

"I didn't go."

"Didn't—That wants finishing first, Lina," I said, interrupting myself, and drawing from among the reels and tapes a magnificent lace-bordered handkerchief, the wedding one, on which she was embroidering, as only her own fairy fingers could, the initials of her future name, "I. H." It had been begun on the previous day, with much preparation, and blushing, and some faint protest that it

was unlucky to mark one's married name until one had absolute claim upon it. But I had joked her out of her little superstition.

She took the beautiful gossamer thing from me, and looking at it for an instant with a faint smile upon her quivering lips, sadder than any tears could be, set herself diligently to pick out the stitches of the last letter.

"What on earth are you about, child?" challenged I, "when you've done it so exquisitely."

No answer. It takes years to build up, moments to destroy, and in a few seconds her ruthless task was done. Then, neatly folding the handkerchief, she placed it on my lap.

"Take it, Netta," she said, "I shan't want it."

"Not—want—it?" gasped I.

"No. We—I—you see, I'm not going to be—his wife."

"Not?—Oh! Lina, what frightful perjuries lovers do talk, to be sure, when they—now what can you have been falling out about, you quarrelsome little creature?"

"There hasn't been any quarrel."

"Oh! That's all right, anyhow. The recreant knight, then? Where may he be at this moment, pray?"

"You mean——"

"I mean Sir Morton, of course."

"At St. Grimwold's, I expect," she calmly replied. "You see, it began to rain——"

"Terrific recriminations?"

"Nonsense. It rained rain. Or it looked as if it soon would. A regular downpour, and I—turned back, and Mor—Sir Morton—went on—that's all."

All! Yes, excepting the heavy, weary sigh that escaped her.

"And that's how you parted?"

"That's how we parted."

"To meet again, how soon? He'll come in to-night."

"He said he should."

"To kiss and be friends?"

"To be friends—yes, always that. For your sake, Netta."

"For my sake?"

She nodded.

"Really, Isoline, the sphinx was nothing to you, my dear; I can't read your riddle a bit."

"No? Can't you?" she said, fixing her eyes with keen scrutiny on mine. "Can't you really? Have patience then, just for a little while—patience with me, you know, because—because—— Oh, Netta, don't talk to me—don't ask me any more questions to-night."

"My darling——"

"No, no. I—oh ! Netta, how cruel I've been to you, and—I—my dear—I can't bear it somehow ——"

"How could you tire yourself out in this fashion?" I asked, looking up in real alarm at her white face and lips that quivered and trembled in some ghastly effort to smile.

"Yes, that's it. I am tired. I'll go to bed, I think."

"Yes, indeed."

"Very tired ; you see, I——"

"Yes, yes. Tell me to-morrow ; you'll be yourself again then, you know. Quite bright."

"Oh, yes. Quite. Good night. Kiss me ; you will—though I did—will you kiss me, Netta?"

"And if Sir Morton comes?" I asked, cheerily, when I had pressed my lips on her cold pale cheek.

"Tell him—oh, Netta !" and, clutching

her hand tight against her heart, she leaned the other for support upon the table.

"He'll be in despair, you know, to think——"

"Will he?" One ghastly faded little smile flickered on the lips upturned to touch mine. "Then you—console him, dear," she said, and, waving me back, she went out alone.

"When Sir Morton comes," thought I, looking after her, "I shall of course understand all about it."

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

